

MOVING TOWARD CREATING
A POLITICALLY ACTIVE
CONGREGATION

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B.S., Nyack College, 1991
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ABSTRACT
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This project seeks to develop awareness of the importance of political activism within the local church generally and Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church of Mount Vernon, New York specifically. The hypothesis is that if parishioners became aware of the biblical, theological and historical basis for public policy, an increase in positive membership involvement and participation will result. A qualitative methodology for this work was developed from conducting group discussions and a sermon series. Once the data was tabulated from the results of the field work, it was revealed that members were in favor of being a politically active congregation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a wonderful journey pursuing a terminal degree. Countless number of hours has been spent collecting data to affirm the writer's presupposition. The writer is deeply grateful for those who participated in making this a wonderful learning experience. The past twenty-two years Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church Mount Vernon, New York has been the writer's clinic to sharpen his working tools in providing affective ministry. The worshippers of this congregation have endured this process over the course of thirty months. They participated in listening to his project sermons, completing the sermon questionnaires, and provided me encouragement to continue this journey until its completion. This speaks volume of their commitment to the writer, and the value they place on a prepared pulpit. FWC is the place where people gather to learn, be empowered and be commissioned.

This process has demonstrated a commitment to the church's mission. Special appreciation is given to Nora Tyndall, Patricia Holt, Doreen Garrison, Malita Jones, Tonya McLaughlin, Neil Cooper, Daniela Cooper, Safiya Swan, Eric Edwers and Latifa Jenkins. These persons rose to the occasion; their essays were most helpful along with the debriefing sessions we held each Sunday after morning worship. The writer observed the transforming of these persons during this process with a new perspective in embracing the importance of a *Politically Active Congregation*.

It is always a delight to have colleagues who understand the process and provide their assistances, my professional associates, Dr. Tommie Jackson, Dr. W. Elliott Baisden, Dr. Edwards O. Williamsom and Dr. Gregory Robeson Smith helped shape the outcome of this project. Their input was of great value and I offer them thanks.

The most significant contributors to this process were the writer's darling wife Aro Denise and children Sherri and Eric. The Edwers' family is a unique unit. They push the writer to get this work done and set the perimeters for his schedule. The writer felt the love and support of his family at critical junctures of this journey. Thanks to the most significant persons in his life.

Finally to the technical support group, who read, edited and placed this document in final form. Thanks for your assistance, knowing that you too have ownership of this final project. Perhaps the writer may have left someone out, it was never his intention, and therefore, he says thanks to all who added something to this process. It is his prayer that this document will contribute to the thoughts and opinions of the brilliant minds who began this discussion.

DEDICATION

Early in the writer's ministry, he was afforded the opportunity to serve one of the greatest men and pastors in the world. Although he was never formally training as a seminarian he brought to the pulpit a wealth of life experience that surpasses any book-knowledge one could attain. The wisdom of this man continues to be the writer's life barometer. Born in the southern tradition, respected by the most skilled and brightest; celebrated his life among his peers as a great churchman, and loved by his family as a great husband, father, grand daddy, and brother. The writer was blessed to have him apart of his life for forty years. The writer dedicates this document to his late Senior Bishop Collie Edwers, his dad, pastor, and hero who now rest in the land of great Christian soldiers. His inspiration continues to inspire the writer, and this work is a testimony to his faith. He birthed a son who continues his legacy of preaching the Gospel. The writer thanks his dad; this is for you and may your soul rest in peace.

INTRODUCTION

Bishop Edwers, who was influenced by his father and mentors observed the role that the church played in civil affairs. Early in the 1960's, the revolution of the civil rights movement was in full swing. This provided the framework for indoctrination to the concept of equal rights for all people. It was within this context that Bishop Edwers grew to understand his responsibility to be engaged in social activism. The attitude of social consciousness was a long tradition held in his family because his parents immigrated from the South, a region that had deprived many African-Americans of their rights to the basic necessities of life in the United States of America. Bishop Edwers father was a pastor who was engaged in protest rallies. He watched how his father and colleagues would meet to plan how to bring awareness to the community regarding various issues. It is at this point that Bishop Edwers developed an appetite for community social activism compelling him to preach the gospel.

From the days of pastors and congregations marching and protesting for civil rights to this the 21st century, questions continue to emerge whether or not the church should engage in politics. As the church presses her way deeper into the 21st century, many African-American leaders and churches have shown themselves determined to develop or challenge social policies. The idea of the separation of church and state is obscure at best, and is therefore, continuously open for interpretation. According to Kenneth Cauthen in an article entitled, *Religion and Politics not Church and State*, Cauthen says, "The question of religion and politics is not the same as the question of

church and state. Failure to make this distinction results in confusion.”¹ Regarding matters of church and state, Cauthen says,

The problem of church and state has to do with institutions and the spheres of action that are appropriate for each. Here the concept of separation is valid. The government does not appoint bishops and pastors for the churches. Churches, meaning here all religious organizations, do not appoint presidents, governors, and judges. No religion can be favored over others or supported by taxes. The state has no role or authority in defining beliefs relating to God and worship. The free exercise of religion is to be guaranteed. The state is neutral between particular religions and permits citizens to believe or not believe in God and to engage or not engage in religious practices or belong to religious organizations according to the dictates of their conscience. There is no religious test for holding office.²

Cauthen goes on to clarify his position further by addressing the differences between religion and politics. Cauthen says,

The problem of religion and politics defines another set of issues. Citizens who belong to religious groups are also members of the secular society, and this dual association gets complicated. Religious beliefs have moral and social implications, and it is appropriate for people of faith to express these through their activities as citizens in the political order. The fact that ethical convictions are rooted in religious faith does not disqualify them from the political realm. However, they do not have secular validity merely because they are thought by their exponents to be religiously authorized. They must be argued for in appropriate social and political terms in harmony with national values.³

Although American society has struggled with the role of the church in politics, scripture in both the Old and New Testament never condemned the intersection of religion and politics.

¹Kenneth Cauthen, “Religion and Politic not Church and State,” <http://www.bigissueground.com/atheistground/cauthen-churchstate.shtml>, (accessed March 17, 2011).

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

This project seeks to explore the theological, biblical and historical understanding that others have wrestled with in the justification or non- justification of the church political involvement? The project attempts to show that the separation of church and state can be misleading at best. Leaders of many African-American Christian churches have never had a non- involvement attitude towards politics or civil affairs. Although the principle mission of the church has been the proclamation of the gospel with the purpose of winning souls for Christ, addressing the basic issues that affect basic quality of life for African-Americans has always been in the playbook of the African-American religious tradition. This project will show that religious leaders have emerged as civic leaders in high positions within government in the Old and New Testament and this still remain a practice of religious leadership in this post modern era.

History has shown that some African-American religious leaders have had a strong conviction regarding the engagement of faith and politics. Some of the African-American religious figures that can be seen as examples are Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Rev. William H. Gray III, Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, and Rev. Floyd Flake. Each of these African-American pastors played a major role in defining the extent or balance of faith and politics within the African-American Church.

History also bears witness to the fact that some African-American ministers had to deal with the negative effect of engaging from the pulpit social issues within their community when their congregation was opposed to political involvement. Rev. Vernon Johns, pioneer of the Civil Right Movement and pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church Montgomery, Alabama found himself embroiled in conflict within his church and community because of his social and political activism. Vernon Johns was socially

outspoken and preached sermons that made his congregation and others feel uncomfortable. Whites and Blacks were threatened by the thoughts of Vernon Johns. His social activism was based on his convictions born through his faith. During Vernon Johns' era, political and social activism had no place in the pulpit. Henry W. Powell writes in his book, *The Life and Times of The Prophet Vernon Johns: Father of the Civil Rights Movement*, "Vernon Johns himself was a victim of a politically correct code. After all, he was constantly violating the code. He was a man who said what others were afraid to say. While inspiring the few, his words made most of his listeners uncomfortable, and this in turn would anger them."

The question remains what is the proper balance of faith and politics? Can Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church, find the proper balance and inspire its leaders and members toward healthy participation in the political arena. This project seeks to create a program that will help an African-American congregation move toward political activity.

In Chapter One, the spiritual journey of Bishop Edwers will unfold allowing the reader to experience the hand of God making and molding a child into an adult and ultimately turning a child into a prophetic voice who wrestles with and confronts issues of political and social unrest and injustice. In this chapter, the intersection of Bishop Edwers and his current context will be illuminated to demonstrate how God calls, equips, and send willing servants into uncharted waters to speak truth to power while striving to level the playing field of life to provide access to the least, the lost and the last in American society.

Chapter Two will address existing models of ministry that speak to the formation and execution of methods and practices toward the eradication of injustice. In this chapter, Bishop Edwers will share critical theologians and scholars who have found success in motivating congregations and community residents to become actively involved in the social and political process of their respective communities. From this chapter, Bishop Edwers will design a model of ministry to implement in his current context in order to extrapolate new data to add to the existing body of knowledge in the area of congregational social and political activism.

Chapter Three will delve into the biblical, theological, historical and theoretical foundations that provide rational and scholarly assurances that this work is being birthed from credible sources. Findings from this foundational exploration will result in the affirmation of existing models of ministry and validate Bishop Edwers presuppositions toward new and cutting edge practices and models of encouraging congregations and communities to greater participation in social and political activism.

Chapter Four will articulate the methodology for the development of the ministry model that is the basis of this work. In order to successfully encourage and empower congregations to participate in social and political activism will largely be dependent upon a model of ministry that reaches the heart of God and the ear of Jesus enabling the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and direct the path of those who's souls are stirred and strangely warmed to serve this present age through the social and political activism process.

Chapter Five will reflect the results of the ministry model after implementation. This chapter will take a critical and analytical look at the presuppositions, hypothesis and

assumptions of Bishop Edwers about social and political activism. From this chapter Bishop Edwers will be able to codify the tangible results of this work and draw basic conclusions based on his findings.

Chapter Six is the culminating chapter of this doctor of ministry project. Here, Bishop Edwers will speak openly and candidly about the process of moving toward a politically active congregation. In this chapter, Bishop Edwers will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of his work, those areas of most significance, his growing edges and aspects of this work that he would do differently. In this chapter, Bishop Edwers will identify how this project can be replicated in other congregations and provide recommendations for continued and further praxis.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY MODEL

The life Journey of C. Nathan Edwers

During the early stages of Collie's Christian walk, he was not clear about God's divine purpose for his life. He had questions about his faith and wanted to know what Jesus Christ had in mind for him. Collie was open to learning about God's purpose for his life and anxious to cooperate with God's grace to the best of his ability.

Collie was born into the family of Collie and Dorothy Edwers who migrated north from the Carolinas in the 1950's. His parents were rooted in deep religious faith and strong family values. His mother, a licensed practical nurse, and his father, a full-time pastor worked to raise six children in a home that grounded his siblings in faith and equipped them with life skills. Thus, the Edwers children grew up in a small supportive community while sharing their faith and values.

Collie's late mother often told the story of the day he was born. She told him that he was born January 19, 1961, during the heart of winter. On that day a nor'easter had rolled through the area. The storm brought with it eighteen inches of snow. The storm was so intense that public transportation stopped and most people stayed home. As a result, the hospital had limited staff and Mrs. Edwers found herself in labor. The activities of the outside did not stop the activities on the inside. God was about to reveal to Collie's mother her new baby. Without all the new modern technologies that could

determine the gender of a child, his mother and father, the doctor and the nursing staff awaited the arrival of what was to be a baby boy. Nine months of anticipation, discomfort and the gender guessing came to an end. God had revealed God's purpose. Dorothy Elizabeth Roddy-Edwers had brought forth a son who had been marked by God to preach God's Word. At the time of his birth, God did not disclose God's self fully to Collie. After all, he was only an infant, but his parents who were people of faith sensed a special anointing on their child's life.

Young Collie's walk with Christ began early in childhood. Baptized by his father, September 1969, and confirmed in the Spirit, Christ accepted him into the family of God. However, it was during a youth revival that his life was forever changed. Although baptized by water, his true encounter with God came through an all night concert of prayer with other members of his youth group. During this night, they were challenged to call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The night began in their minds as a night full of fun and laughter but this youth group would experience an unforgettable encounter. The God of Collie's parents would become Collie's personal savior.

Words fail to describe that moment because it was not an emotional high but the personal presence of God dwelling among them. It was the refreshing breath of God blowing upon Collie and directing the course of his life. It was that night that he finally realized that God was real and had a plan for his life. His youth group was on fire; excitement filled the room; and they were charged to pass testimony to one another. That encounter lit a fire within Collie that continues to energize the mission of his life. That initial encounter with God was just the beginning for this young man. Later in life, he would experience a true awareness of his calling to the Gospel ministry.

As a child growing up, his life took many different turns. He knew that there was something different about him but God's plan remained a mystery to him. Early on in his schooling, he was misdiagnosed and misunderstood by many, but God continued to guide and support him. If labels had the ability to stop God's plan, he would not be where he is today. In the sixties, while in elementary school, he was tested to see if he was an emotionally disturbed child. He was simply a child who desired to know God better. It was an internal drive that pushed him to act out what he felt. The educators concluded that he was Mentally Retarded Educatable (MRE). When he was told that he was MRE, he asked for an explanation. He was simply placed in a classroom with severely retarded children. His neighborhood friends shunned and laughed at him. Collie was excluded from playing with normal children. He knew that he had neither physical handicaps nor any learning disabilities. His teachers tried to justify the label MRE as a behavioral problem. Even at that early age he desired to enter into ministry. No one understood his inner attraction to serve God.

Once he graduated from elementary school, he headed to middle school where God brought people into his life that recognized his God-given gifts. His character and personality were further shaped by the positive influence of his high school guidance counselor who encouraged him to develop every aspect of his personality. Collie enjoyed football and wrestling and these sports taught him the importance of discipline and perseverance. Those experiences instilled in him a deep sense of responsibility. The principles of teamwork became well grounded in him. Whether as dishwasher, security guard, landscaper, choir president, Helping Hands Club President, Church Trustee, or

Bible teacher, he was always a team player. He could be counted upon to work collaboratively with others.

During Collie's high school days a greater awareness of his calling began to emerge. While preparing to complete his final scheduling for high school graduation, his advisor began to offer him a possible life plan. She knew that Collie had an interest in ministry and had accepted the call to preach the gospel. She directed him to enroll after graduation in Bible College. In his tradition he had never heard of an institution that had as its mission to teach Bible on a college level. The pieces of the puzzle were coming together for him.

It was during his junior year of high school that he had a conversation with his dad about preaching the gospel and working in full-time ministry. At that young stage of life, he had a passion for preaching the Word. The calling was not mysterious, rather it was a weight pressing upon him that he was unable to shake. The conversation with his guidance counselor was the confirmation that he was headed down the right path. He had no other thoughts about any other vocation or career except to do the work of the Lord. At that time, it was rare to have a sixteen year old preacher. He remembered the night he preached his first sermon. The house was packed, well wishers, curiosity seekers, family and friends were all gathered to hear him deliver God's Word. He was frightened but confident in the God who had sent him to preach the gospel. His father presented him to the congregation and from that moment on a peace came over him that confirmed that this was his life mission. Once the sermon ended, his father proceeded to ask the congregation to affirm Collie's calling. It was at that moment that the entire congregation stood to confirm the Spirit of God moving in Collie's life. They enthusiastically

acknowledged that God had called him to proclaim the Word. This began a spiritual journey that continues one step at a time even today.

Collie remembered during those days that his father did all he could to show him the full picture of what a minister is called to do and be in ministry. His father became his mentor and he was a mentor indeed. He would push him, ignore him, and challenge him. His dad became a living witness of a minister as he preformed his duties in serving the people of God.

God was at work in this season of preparation. He allowed Collie's father to be absent from his pulpit and pastoral duties for three months because of a sudden illness. During that time, Collie's theoretical training took on a practical thrust. He was forced to implement what he had learned from his mentor-father. During this period, he officiated at his first funeral, performed baptisms and conducted his first wedding. Each Sunday he had to present a sermon that was relevant to the needs of his father's congregation. It was a challenge to lead a congregation of believers during the illness of its pastor. The ideas Collie had about ministry were further shaped during those three months as the supply minister.

When his father returned to his pulpit, God had prepared Collie for a new assignment. Events happened that God used to push him to his next assignment. Those events were not caused by dissatisfaction with his performance or a power struggle between his dad and him. Instead, he became aware of his role as a support to his father's ministry, but at the same time it caused a restless spirit to come over him that pushed him towards his own destiny. Collie knew that he was ready for his own parish ministry.

Collie's father, a prominent denomination leader, had built a wonderful network of churches and leaders. A church under his dad's supervision contacted him seeking a candidate for the position of pastor. His dad had always provided opportunities for Collie to share his gift of preaching, and this was another opportunity for him. He preached at this church and they received him well and asked if he would return to preach again. They informed his father that some of the members were interested in selecting his son as their pastor. Collie thought that he was on course and this was perfect timing. They sat down with him and began to negotiate the terms of the position of pastor. Excitement filled his spirit and he felt this was the will of the Lord. The selection process had narrowed down to just a couple of candidates. The election of pastor was approaching and all indications pointed to Collie as the next pastor.

The night of the election Collie waited for the call. No call came that night and the next morning still no call. He convinced his father to contact the chairman of the Deacon Board to find out what happened. After several attempts, his father reached the deacon. While his father talked with the deacon, Collie was listening and he would never forget hearing the words, "Bishop, the church membership went the other way." Those words were heart breaking and he broke down in tears with disappointment. This was a great lesson for him to learn not to put his trust in man but to rely upon the Lord. This was his first major setback but it was an important God-moment in his life. God began to minister to his hurt and this experience gave him renewed strength.

The story does not end with that setback. That setback was a delay but it was not a denial. God was working God's will in Collie's life. Fresh out of Bible College and headed towards seminary, ministry opportunities were opening for him. January 26,

1983, he was invited to pastor Calvary Freewill Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York. This church had recently asked their long-term pastor to leave.

What an awesome responsibility this was for a young single preacher from a rural community. It was indeed a culture shock. Collie had fond memories of driving to his new assignment with a great zeal for the ministry. The church was located near the Broadway Junction, the gateway to East New York. During the work week there were hundreds of people going to work and later heading home at day's end, passed by the church. However, on Sunday, the flow of pedestrian traffic came to a virtual halt. "Ah, Collie thought, my work is cut out for me here." He decided to develop a ministry concept of a church without walls. He combined pulpit ministry with street ministry to reach people.

He took the playbook script from what he had seen his father institute in his own ministry. Collie began to see ministry in a more holistic manner and meeting the diverse needs of people became his focus. This concept of ministry afforded him an opportunity to embrace a partnership with government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and community neighborhood associations. He learned how to work *outside the box*. He started a food pantry, a clothes center, and launched youth activities so that the church could connect and engage the community. Calvary Church truly became Collie's training ground for ministry. The successes and failures experienced in Brooklyn helped define his own ministry playbook.

While serving at Calvary, Collie met his life partner. He arrived at his new pastorate and he saw a beautiful women sitting in the second pew in front of him. Although she wasn't paying much attention to him, his eyes were fixed on her. To his

surprise, she turned out to be the daughter of one of the trustees. Once receiving that information he thought it wasn't such a good idea to pursue her. He decided to find someone else. However, over time they became friends. As a young single pastor, Collie set bounds with the young ladies of the church, but in his heart there was something special about his friend Denise. Gradually she became interested in Collie and they decided to date each other privately. Collie came to Calvary with no intention of finding a wife but God had other plans. After a lengthy courtship, Collie proposed to her while cleaning the church baptism pool (of all places). It was Saturday, September 5, 1987 that they were united in marriage at Calvary Church.

In the fall of 1988, something began happening to him as he continued his pastoral service at Calvary Unified Freewill Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. The prior spring he had just completed five years of ministry there. Calvary Church held a tremendous amount of sentimental value to him and that continues even today. It was his first pastorate, and it was where he met and married his wife Denise. It was there also that they had their first child Sherri. He had the fondest memories of the *saints* who influenced and helped shape his ministry there.

During that fall, God created a climate of frustration in Collie's life regarding the ministry. Before this season of frustration, he had started to become a little too complacent. There were battles that had to be fought to establish the right of the current pastor to lead. Those battles were won and those who remained were committed to following the vision outlined by the pastor. The church had a small core group of committed believers who were determined to do ministry at any cost. God had a different plan for Collie.

He recalled one day when he was so frustrated that he went into the sanctuary and yelled, "God, Lord, I need help." God was pushing him out. He had long dreamed about being in charge of this church. He thought that the church was ready to grow and flourish in the work of ministry. God had God's purpose in mind for Calvary Church and its pastor. What God was doing was pushing him out and preparing Calvary Church for a new level of ministry without him. Calvary Church was not Collie's final destiny but only a stop along the way to his new destination.

Throughout this process, God created a new Calvary Church and a new Pastor C. Nathan Edwers all at the same time. During this transition, Collie could not understand what was going on. He learned that things that seem impossible to understand become understandable as one continues to walk by faith. The frustration he experienced was God's way of saying, "Your assignment is over here, and you must move on to the next one." He was learning an important lesson that every minister must learn—never become too comfortable at any one assignment. He remembered his father telling him that a minister must always wear ministry assignments *like a loose garment*. A minister of God must be prepared for change at any moment.

It was September of 1988 when he was sent by his father to preach at a church without a pastor in Mount Vernon, New York. His assignment was to be a supply preacher for that Sunday morning service. Once he arrived, a feeling came upon him that this assignment was more than just about preaching that day. He felt that God was opening another door for him. The people connected with him as though they had known him for a long time. Renewed with excitement, Collie began to watch God orchestrate a

move in his life. Little did he know that his young wife and new baby would be moving to this new congregation.

December 1988, Collie was among the final candidates for the pastorate at Little Friendship Freewill Baptist Church. Their actions made it clear to him that God had a plan in place for him. The first Sunday of January 1989 began a new year, as Friendship Deacons invited him to come, preach, and conduct their communion. It was a challenge leaving Calvary Church on this major Sunday where he was assigned, but he sensed after much prayer that God was calling him to Little Friendship Church. It was at the end of the service that his spirit became knitted to this congregation. One week later he received calls from several members of the church that they had extended an invitation to him to be their new pastor.

Calvary Church had provided him with the tools to be successful in his second pastorate. What he learned during six years at Calvary Church has yielded a successful twenty year ministry at Friendship Worship Center Mount Vernon, New York. As pastor of this church, responding to the social issues facing the community has become a pathway to proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Transfusing his faith with issues that affect the lives of all people has enabled him to become a true ambassador of Christ in Mount Vernon, New York.

He admits that leaving Calvary Church was a hard transition. When he came to Calvary Church, he arrived as a young man trying to find himself in the ministry. During those six years, the training he needed for his ministry vocation was acquired, tested, and confirmed. His heart had been knitted with the members of Calvary Church but his work was completed there. It was time to move on. The night that he submitted his resignation

as pastor was a bitter sweet meeting. Those who had grown fond of him were happy for his promotion but they were concerned about the next phase of their own church. This was a God-moment that afforded him the opportunity to assure this congregation that God would take care of them. Once he assured them that everything would be all right, the peace of God came upon all of them. Right up to this day, Collie enjoys a strong relationship with the people of his first pastorate. They grew together and Collie departed in loving affirmation.

The big day arrived, the fourth Sunday of January 1989 the official start of Collie's new pastoral ministry. He arrived at the church early and was met at the door. The reception was overwhelming. People were excited about this new era in the life of their church. This surprised him because prior to his coming, the congregation had split twice within a period of five years. Many people shared their hurts and distrust of pastoral leadership during the search committee process. He expected the worst but planned for the best. While reflecting on those initial days, he realizes now that God prepared their hearts to receive his ministry. Immediately the church began to grow and prosper. Collie embraced this assignment with enthusiasm and prayer.

The year of 1997 became a defining moment for Collie's ministry at Friendship Freewill Baptist Church. During that year God began to test his faith. This test was not for God's benefit but for his own. In the summer of 1996 he led Friendship Church in the burning of the mortgage that he had acquired upon assuming the pastorate. God helped the congregation liquidate that mortgage three years ahead of schedule. They were able to do extensive renovation on the church building as well as reduce the debt. Most of the members were excited that they were finally debt-free. Many of the lay leaders felt that

this was a season of rest. Not so. The Spirit was beginning to stir within Collie. Just the same, after all the work everyone was exhausted. At the same time, the church had outgrown the newly renovated building and it was land-locked with nowhere to expand.

It was October 30, 1997, that Collie received a call from his mentor Reverend W. F. Richardson. He informed Collie that the Emmanuel Jewish Center synagogue was up for sale. The seed was planted. Collie wasted no time in inquiring about the sale of the property at 261 East Lincoln Avenue. On that very day he arranged for several members to meet him at the synagogue to take a tour of the facility. After the tour, he heard the Lord speak to him. God said, "It's time to move the church to this new location." This was a burden pressing heavily on his heart. He literally was frightened about this new assignment. He could not figure out how he could tell this congregation that God said it was time to move.

The church had been located on that spot for more than forty years. The new pastor was not yet forty years old. Collie remembers the eve of that Sunday morning worship well. He had a restless night, thinking about how to present this to the congregation. He invited key leaders to visit the site with him. They were speechless but gave no indication of confirmation. Collie was trying to figure out a way, and the more he thought the harder the task appeared to him.

That Sunday he proceeded to the church, and while in his office, God whispered once again, "Collie, it's time to move." He proceeded to the pulpit that morning with this assignment weighing heavily on his heart. After the morning announcement, he was trembling in his shoes. It was time to make the announcement about the meeting after morning service. Collie made his pastoral comments that morning but he could not bring

himself to make the announcement at that time. Reflecting on this moment, it was indeed a major crossroad in Collie's faith life. After the pastoral comments, the choir sang and it was time to preach. Before preaching, the Holy Spirit again prompted him, "Now is the time to make the announcement about the meeting after service." After he finished preaching and had given the final closing, Collie was ready to speak. The entire church stayed to hear what he had to say. That morning the church was full and word had leaked out that the pastor wanted to move the location of the church. All eyes were on him listening to what he had to say.

He proceeded to share with the congregation God's inspiration to him. After he finished, he opened the floor for discussion. One of the key leaders and long time members asked to speak. Collie thought to himself that the idea was good but this lady was about to kill it. Unbelievably, that key leader was in agreement with him. "It's time to move," she declared. Collie could not believe what he was hearing. He was concerned about those members who had a landmark stake in that building but one by one they echoed the same sentiment. "It's time to move." That day Collie called for a vote and everybody except one voted to move.

It has often been said that God gives us a warning before God takes action. For many years, a number of guest speakers who have graced the pulpit of Little Friendship have said to the congregation that it was time to take the word *little* off the name of the church. In the summer of 1998 this came to pass. What followed were the tireless efforts of the membership to host fundraisers and special events to buy the 1.3 million dollar property. All the hard work paid off. In August 1998, the congregation marched across

town and moved into their new home at 261 East Lincoln Avenue, Mount Vernon, NY.

The name of the church was officially renamed Friendship Worship Center.

After the march into Friendship Church's new location, Collie was met with health challenges from both his parents. Although his father was a strong healthy man all at once he developed renal failure. His mother had battled with heart disease for years, and his father required long term care. Collie saw his role shift in a matter of days. Collie became his parents' emotional support. Collie's father recognized that he had to prepare a succession plan for the conference he presided over for the past twenty-seven years. He decided to present his son as a candidate for bishopric. Collie's heart was overwhelmed because this was the ultimate affirmation he could receive from his father. It was March 1999 that Collie's dad and the Freewill Baptist denomination leaders gathered to consecrate his son. Collie was consecrated in the fourth episcopacy line of succession. He recalls the moment that he felt a spiritual high. He felt that the mantle of leadership had fallen upon him.

The coming years have been met with blessings and sorrows. The loss of Collie's beloved parents was painful. Nothing could ever describe the hurt and pain he experienced. His mother was the first to make the transition and twenty-nine months later his father made his transition. Collie's parents were his tower of strength, the push behind him that gave him courage. The death of his mother was the most traumatic. His faith was tested on a level he had never known. Although he had comforted many families in their time of need, this time Collie himself needed to be comforted. Hurt has a way of pushing the best or worst out of a person in times of trial. The problem he had with his mother's death was that God had not given him any warning. No clue, no warning. It just happened

and she was gone. He now knows the true meaning of a bleeding heart. It was during that moment that Collie turned to God for strength. He learned the power of intimacy with God. Nothing and nobody could ease the pain he felt but God. As a result of this trial, his prayer life deepened and he became aware that God did indeed have a plan for his life. After the death of Collie's father in August 2001, he was elected presiding Bishop of Middle Atlantic Unified Freewill Baptist Churches Annual Conference (NJ, NY & CT). His duties grew and he was asked to pastor a second church. In May, 2002, a call was extended to him to pastor Mount Zion UFW Baptist Church Edison, in New Jersey. This was his childhood church. He accepted the call with the understanding that he would remain pastor of Friendship Church.

Throughout Collie's ministry, he found himself engaged in social issues that affected people's quality of life. Collie's passion to lift people up caused him to connect with many civic organizations. He became a founding member of Save Our Seed; a group of clergy who were fed up with the killing of youth in their community. They sponsored *Gospel in the Park*, an annual gathering of the city to bring attention to youth violence and to say that all must work harder to live together in peace and harmony. He joined the Mount Vernon Kiwanis Club to help provide scholarships to needy youth within his community. His involvement found him working with the local Hospital Advisory Board and the Neighborhood Health Center. Collie found ways to serve the broader community by taking his pulpit to the people. His was a church without walls. Collie applied pressure to bringing about change by creating the Mount Vernon's Independent Clergy Group. This group worked with civil groups to address issues and resolve many social problems.

All of this involvement was leading Collie towards an even more active role in city politics.

Collie was recognized by government officials who recognized his drive and commitment to making a difference within his local community and the entire city. He was appointed police chaplain, a member of the city's Planning Board, Commissioner and President of Civil Service, District Leader for the Mount Vernon Democratic City Committee and was selected by the officials from Barack Obama's campaign to serve as an alternate delegate to the Democratic National Convention. This led him to a better understanding of the important role that politics can have in affecting the lives of the people he was called to serve. Collie began to sense that God was creating a larger platform where he could facilitate positive change to the benefit of all.

Throughout this process, he was able to maintain his prophetic voice because he knew that this access was about providing greater resources to the community. Over the course of time, Collie learned to appreciate his dual roles as prophet and public servant. Although he had many critics that questioned his ability to be effective in both arenas, he was never deterred by the naysayers because he saw this as an invitation by God to lead. June 2009, things started coming together. The Democratic Party leadership approached Collie to run for City Council. He was asked to think about it and consult with his wife and family. Wow! What a bomb shell dropped upon him. This invitation ushered him into new role with greater visibility in the community. After much prayer and contemplation, Collie decided to run and he received the nomination of the Mount Vernon City Democratic Party for City Council. During this time Collie kept pondering in his mind, "What is the role of religion and politics for me?" He remained steadfast as he grappled

with how to harmonize both leadership positions. He knew his role was never to impose his religious belief on others but to serve the community through justice, fairness and integrity. This indeed was a God-moment in his life. The scripture states "Let your light shine." He began to understand that with God's help, this dual service would become the greatest testimony of his faith.

The Mount Vernon Inquirer Newspaper reported, "In June of this year, Collie surprised many when he received the Mount Vernon City Democratic Party nomination for City Council." Due to a ballot irregularity, Edwers and his entire slate were knocked off the ballot. After an unsuccessful effort to have the lower court's decision overturned by the Appellate Division and the Court of Appeals, the Bishop and the other candidates decided to run on the Independent Line in the November 3rd General Election. When asked by a reporter if running for City Council would interfere with his duties as pastor of Friendship Worship Center, and if it created a conflict of interest, he replied, "I am not running my campaign as a minister. I am running my campaign as a citizen of this community. I think that what I am attempting to do is an extension of my service to this community. So I do not see a conflict in what I am doing since I am a citizen of Mount Vernon. I have a right to run in order to improve the quality of life for those who live within this great city." Bishop Edwers was next asked, "Why should the citizens of Mount Vernon vote for you?" He replied, "I am a proven community leader for over twenty years. I have been actively engaged in the issues that affect the safety and quality of life of the citizens. I am acutely aware of the function of government because I have been around government and know how it functions. So what I bring to the table is awareness of what government is and what it should be. I have learned over the years

how to navigate the bureaucracy and work with others in finding solutions to issues of interest and concern to the people." Lastly, the Bishop stated that quality of life issues will be his main focus. Issues such as safe streets, economic development, reduction of violence, and accessible and affordable healthcare are key concerns of the people. "If elected, I will concentrate my energy on the issues that will help resolve these issues within Mount Vernon." said the Bishop.

Collie has learned a great deal from his vast experiences in church and city leadership. Those experiences have further shaped his theological perspective and prepared him to play a role in addressing the challenges of the city of Mount Vernon. He has immersed himself in trying to make a difference in the lives of all people who cross his path. His journey has been full of joy and sorrow, ups and downs, but his attitude has always been to accept the hand he has been dealt and make the best of it with the grace of God. Little did Collie Edwers know when he first decided to take the pulpit to the streets as a young minister in Brooklyn that it would lead him into the public arena where he could truly let his light shine as both a preacher and a politician; and the journey continues.

Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church

A ministry profile prepared for Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church (FWC), Mount Vernon, New York, encompasses a three mile radius. It provides an overview of the FWC community. Thirty-seven and three tenths percent of people who were polled are not involved with their faith. The preferred religious practice is Catholic. The polling indicated that African-Americans are a growing population. The average age

is 37.8 with a median household income is \$52,746. The largest population segment of the study indicated that most households are single parent households or single dwellers. The main concern of the people reporting is meeting their basic needs. The church is looked upon favorable when it is engaged in addressing social concerns.

The United Black Clergy of Westchester plays a significant part as a social advocacy group that challenges the intersection of faith and civic responsibilities. This group influenced Reverend Edwers early in his ministry in Mount Vernon by encouraging him to move beyond the FWC pulpit and confront issues of social injustice in the streets. He saw the fruition of the convergence of faith and politics as his involvement deepened. The conceptualization of his faith together with his politics shaped his thoughts as he responded to the call to action.

Twice a month he sat with his peers to assess the situation and plan a course of action to improve the quality of life for his community. The visibility of this group allowed Edwers to broaden his ministry throughout the city. He was appointed to various committees and became Vice President of this group. Pastors and ministers from various gender-friendly denominations, sat twice a month to assess, monitor, and identify social issues that required action for the good of all people. As the demographics change, the disparities become more evident among African-Americans in Mount Vernon, New York.

The area around FWC shows a pattern of immigration and a shifting from a predominately White city in the sixties to a predominately Black population in the seventies and to the present. Whites moved out leaving the city with an under-funded education system and inadequate housing. At present, a law suit is being considered

because the City of Mount Vernon became the dumping ground for displaced families who were victims of urban renewal during the fifties in upscale communities like White Plains, New York to accommodate influential whites and businesses. Those actions have significant effects on the quality of housings, schools, and services for the citizens of Mount Vernon. Change comes slow with the involvement of people who are about making a difference.

The context of Bishop Collie Nathan Edwers for the past twenty years and beyond has remained the same but the issues of each generation are different. The faith community must intersect with the political community to establish a process of collaboration to accomplish and create a world where equality of service becomes the norm. This has happened many times within the community with the creation of summits to find solutions to ongoing problems. Ministers are called to be prophetic not merely foretelling but forth-telling in God's name. The prophet preacher becomes the spokesperson on behalf of God to liberate the opposed. It is within this context that Collie's ministry has had the greatest impact.

Bishop Edwers ministry at FWC is the continuation of a legacy of social activism. His first encounter was with the Ninth Avenue Neighborhood Association. He became aware that the city had an upsurge of drug activity that involved drug overdose and killings. This issue became a priority for him. He organized a march down Third Street in order to draw attention to the problem in that area. This event launched his civic involvement in the community. Over time he became more and more involved in quality of life issues of concern to the people. He found himself engaged in disputes between

Mount Vernon and Sound Shore Hospitals, the Mount Vernon Board of Education over multiculturalism, control of the City School Board, human rights concerns, and the Stop the Violence Campaign. The more he engaged in local issues, the more he became respected as a leader in the community. Consequently, he was appointed to various committees and boards. His view of politics was shaped by the teaching of Christ as he was called *to liberate the poor*.

Friendship Church became a voice for those who were voiceless. The pulpit became the center of communicating the conscience of God and the voice of reason. Although at times Edwers had to make politicians uncomfortable by reminding them of their responsibility, he was clear about his role. Edwers knew that his call was from God and his accountability was to God. His involvement was not without conflict. Edwers experienced the resentment of some congregates who felt that the best use of his time was only to concentrate on parish concerns and leave politics alone. Community activism at times brands the preacher as being disengaged with his spirituality and self-serving.

Edwers overcame the criticism by continuing his focus of improving the quality of life for all people. Friendship Church became his platform to raise issues and mobilize his congregation to action. The historic expectation of Friendship Church for its pastor has always been to partner with the United Black Clergy, the recognized non-denominational advocacy group. Upon arriving at his assignment at Friendship he was taken to their monthly meeting to engage and joined their efforts.

A Natural Fit: Pastor and Context

The exposure of Collie's home church became his launching pad to social activism. St. Mark's Church Food Panty and Soup Kitchen, and the rising consciousness of the social ills through the messages of his father, helped Collie define his own pastoral role. Calvary Church was the clinic where God allowed Collie to implement what he had learned. Calvary Church, Brooklyn, NY, was not engaged in any social activism, but Collie connected with local pastors who had a proven record of combining faith and politics. Collie was introduced to political officials who afforded him the opportunity to engage in discussions that gave him access in formulation of policies. God does order our footsteps and push us in the direction of destiny. Collie has fond memories of Reverend Doctors, William Jones, Bob Law, Linwood Taylor, Charles Nesbitt, and others who helped shape his theology of liberation. God had placed these leaders within his midst to share stories of how they contributed to the improved condition of humanity.

The African American church has a long tradition of social activism which can be traced back to the emancipation of slaves. The Underground Railroad was navigated with religious signals that were influenced by the black preacher. People have often tried to discredit the role of the preacher as it relates to politics but the shaping and influence of policies always has been the preacher's task.

Although the expectation of the pastor is to shepherd his flock, shepherding requires nurturing. Nurturing must be done on every level and phase of the people's lives we are called to serve. Collie's life and context of ministry seemed to be designed though his faith in God to influence politics. Collie never bought into the idea of total separation

of state and church because Collie knew that one's faith must influence one's actions. A faithless anything is a sign of recklessness, and the recklessness of faithless people oppresses the poor.

Collie started his engagement with East New York Community Board, Brooklyn, New York. This was Collie's first encounter with the political drama of his pariah community. The Metropolitan Minister Conference in which Collie was a member began addressing crime and violence within the borough of Brooklyn. Collie learned quickly how to bridge the gap between faith and politics. Every phase of Collie's ministry pushed him toward public service.

Collie received his training for pastoral social activism in the city of New York only to use those tools in the small suburban community of Mount Vernon, New York. Friendship Church had a history within the community of participating in the social action movements. The demographics of Mount Vernon, the gateway to Westchester County, were a hot spot in which reform was critical for the survival of African Americans. Equality became the order of the day. Collie participated in rallies that always integrated faith and politics. The teaching of Jesus Christ commands us that we must meet the needs of people on every level. His faith shaped his politics and can be traced from the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament prophets who were the mouth pieces of God.

The prophetic preacher's role is to speak to the heart of the conscience of humankind. This role is not new to the preacher; it is clearly defined by the role that Jeremiah played in calling the nation to repentance. Jeremiah, from his mother's womb received a calling to prophesize. This placed Jeremiah center stage between the political

shakers and movers. His calling pushed him to confront the moral and social injustices that God could no longer accept. Jeremiah was given a call to action. The call is the mandate that a prophet/preacher must accept. Questions that arise regarding one's call will surface. This is a human reaction, but the God who calls always prepares those who are called for the assignment. Abram, Moses and others throughout the Old Testament questioned the validity of their calling; but the caller, God Jehovah, affirmed their calling through verbal expression. One's faith in God must be the driving force in the integration of faith and politics. The voice of the prophet is only the human instrument that God uses to transform systems that affect lives. Collie knew that God called him to be God's mouthpiece. Although Collie, like others, wrestled with his calling at first, his desire to fulfill his mission on earth pushed him toward God's ultimate plan.

Collie's call pushed him toward action. This action created opportunity to serve at his home church which, in fact, provided the training to decide which battles were important to fight. Collie learned early that all battles are worth fighting, but ones that have the greatest impact take priority. Collie discussed the lessons he learned by watching his father pick his battles. Collie acknowledged that at times he thought his father had missed the opportunity to confront an issue but learned fast that his father knew how to develop a calculated timetable to go into action. Collie likewise developed a plan of action to combine both faith and politics. His plan was to understand God's call, assess an assignment, look for opportunities to expose God's message, and always be clear that we are the mouthpiece of God. Collie said, "Never apology for what God has led and instructed an individual to do, but always be certain that your engagement has God's backing."

The involvement of politics does not diminish the role of the prophet/preacher, but places him or her in the midst of the action. Collie's role in ministry allows him to be outspoken about injustices. Over time, this has placed him center stage within his community to address issues in which the voiceless could not be heard. Collie learned early in pastoral ministry that people are looking for leadership among the clergy. The voice of the pulpit in most instances has been the voice of reason and conscience. The prophet/preacher must always have a spirit of independence.

Politicians try to wage war within the clergy community to neutralize those clergy who irritate the status quo. Community involvement is critical. Collie's involvement with civic groups helped him establish himself with the credentials that gave him access to public officials and to bridge the gap that at times disconnected politicians from ordinary citizens. Community activism is about bringing together the community leaders from various backgrounds to sit around the table to coordinate efforts in addressing concerns and devising a plan of action or finding solutions that will lift the community. Collie has watched this process unfold by engaging in the process that brought the community together.

Common interests bring people together to find a sound solution. Trusted leaders from the clergy community are always sought out to sit on boards, committees, and commissions, to ensure that sound decisions are made regarding all citizens. Collie found himself among the short list of clergypersons chosen to participate in the governance of the city where he lives and serves. Collie's faith was strengthened when he fulfilled the commandment of Christ. We are to liberate the poor and oppressed.

This liberation occurs when faith and politics collaborate ultimately to improve the quality of life of the people.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

In this chapter, the reader is exposed to a plethora of writers, scholars, academicians and others in the areas of social and political activism. Because of their work, the church has been given an appropriate voice in the social and political activism arena. While the prevailing notion about this topic is that there should be separation between church and state, the writer, who is a spiritual leader as well as a politician, seeks to bring wisdom and clarity to support the premise that the church has a critical role in the political process. In the design of a model for ministry, the writer used a number of persons who have provided successful models and processes for allowing parishioners to appropriately enter the political arena from the pew.

In providing various models of existing and effective social and political activism, the writer was able to design an additional model that met the needs of a desire to educate and empower a congregation toward political involvement while holding true to the tenants of faith and spiritual reformation that were learned.

In the book, *Something Within: Religion in African American Political Activism*, Fredrick C. Harris writes about the late Bishop Author Brazier who lived a life of social and political activism. According to Harris, Bishop Brazier was quoted as saying, "All together we will be able to see the great power that we have." Brazier goes on to say that, "America is a political animal, a political society, a political country, and those who have

ever seen political power must understand that in order to have great power we must be part of the political process. Do you understand that, because that is why you are here.”¹

The statement by Bishop Brazier is an excellent example of the church’s role in the socio-political arena. In fact, there are churches all over the country who have found meaningful ways of holding in tension, the sacred and the secular. If you were a member of Bishop Brazier’s congregation, you would know with unwavering certainty that religion assists African Americans in the political process by describing, analyzing, and explaining the various ways in which Afro-Christianity stimulates African American political activism.²

As Fredrick Harris continues to share the success of Bishop Brazier and his role in keeping his congregation in the middle of the political arena, Harris also says that when it comes to the church, there are two competing and prevailing perspectives. The first Harris calls the opiate theory which insists that Afro-Christianity promotes otherworldliness, functioning as an instrument of political pacification and fatalism. The second perspective he calls the inspiration theory, it makes exactly the opposite claim, arguing that Afro-Christianity has played a central role in black politics, catalyzing, for example, the collective involvement of African Americans in the modern civil rights movement.³

While Harris sees a dichotomy between otherworldliness and inspiration, he also sees as important the underestimation of the multidimensionality of religious beliefs and

¹Fredrick C. Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

practices—the diversity of religious belief and expression and the potential variety of ways different religious forms might affect political participation. According to Harris, religious multidimensionality has been a focus of religious scholars for decades, yet critics of Afro-Christianity and political behaviorist alike have tended to over look it, viewing religion as discrete and unitary.

In quoting Kenneth Wald, political scientist who worked to develop a multidimensional approach to political activism, Wald says, “Religious ideas are potentially powerful sources of commitment and motivation, and they should not be underestimated as resources for participation”. Harris goes on to say that religious ideals inspire people to act politically because of a unique set of participatory incentives. These incentives are so powerful that “human beings will make enormous sacrifices if they believe themselves to be driven by a divine force”. And sense these ideas are sacred to believers, and thus in their minds beyond doubt, they provide powerful cues for activism.⁴

In writing this work, Fredrick Harris’ desire was to show how religiously based resources affect black political participation rather than to assess the political behavior of black ministers and churches. To take a multidimensional approach to the study of religion and black political activism demonstrates how religion can mobilize religious blacks, both through church networks and independently of church networks. Harris says that skills developed in the course of church work, for instance, can be mobilized behind church-sanctioned support for political candidates or can be employed for political activities that require skills such as public speaking, planning meetings, or raising money. Religiously inspired feelings of political empowerment can be reinforced by a minister’s

⁴Ibid., 8.

sermon, but they can also be personally activated when activist themselves become unsure of and fearful about their participation.

According to Andrew R. Rappaport in, *Political Activism: A Christian's Role*, all citizens in the United States of America have the obligation to vote and should honor that right. He goes on to raise the question of how much further should Christians go to get a message out and what is that message? And while the last few decades may have blurred the lines of a succinct and well defined Christian message, Rappaport says that it is time for Christians to reexamine their role and responsibility in political activism. While scripture teaches that Christians should submit to government, according to Romans 13, living the Christian life in an ungodly society is never easy. This is why it is critical for all parishioners to have an awareness of the issues in society and prepare to vote and take action if necessary toward the eradication of ungodly behaviors, values and injustice.⁵

The United Methodist Church, as a denomination, sees being involved in the social and political activism process as a justice issue. Since the days of John Wesley, Methodists have held strong beliefs related to social justice, mission and outreach ministries. In the *United Methodist 2004 Book of Resolutions*, it reads in part,

Taking an active stance in society is nothing new for followers of John Wesley. He set the example for us to combine personal and social piety. Ever since predecessor churches to United Methodism flourished in the United States, we have been known as a denomination involved with people's lives, with political and social struggles, having local to international mission implications. Such involvement is an expression of the personal change we experience in our baptism and conversion.⁶

⁵Andrew R. Rappaport, "Political Activism: A Church's Role" http://www.strivingforeternity.org/docs/Political_Activism_A_Christians_Role.html (accessed March 10, 2011).

⁶*The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004).

The United Methodist Church believes God's love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. United Methodists, according to their canon of faith, cannot just be observers. Methodists, care enough about lives to risk interpreting God's love, to take a stand, to call each person into a response, no matter how controversial or complex. Methodism's social justice process helps its members to think and act from a faith perspective, and not from the reactions of various social and political groups that exists in society.⁷

In an effort to keep Methodists actively engaged in social and political activism, the United Methodist Church publishes weekly a newsletter providing news and views from the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church.

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the church equips its members to address political and social questions by helping the members to develop a well-formed conscience. In the 2007 publication of *For Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows Catholics to justify doing whatever is wanted, neither is it a mere feeling about what congregants should do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding to the human heart, revealing the truth to Catholics and calling the people to do what is good while shunning what is evil.⁸

⁷Ibid.

⁸*For Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Politically Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (Washington, D.C. United States Conference of Bishops, 2007).

Teachings of the Catholic Church are clear that a good end does not justify an immoral means. As Catholics seek to advance the common good—by defending the inviolable sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until natural death, by defending marriage, by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, by welcoming the immigrant and protecting the environment—it is important to recognize that not all possible courses of action are morally acceptable. Catholics have a responsibility to discern carefully which public policies are morally sound. Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social and political problems, but **Catholics** cannot differ on the moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended.⁹

Anthony B. Pinn, writes a critical review of R. Drew Smith's edited work, *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Cultures in Post-Civil Rights America*. According to Pinn, *New Day Begun* provides a much needed update to the work of Lincoln and Mamiya's *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. *New Day Begun* highlights the relationship between black churches and public life in the post-civil rights years. Pinn goes on to say that although Smith's work updates the work of Lincoln and Mamiya, it is not based on substantial primary sources. Therefore, *The*

⁹Ibid.

Black Church in the African American Experience remains the seminal work on the Black Church because of the sociological data upon which it is based.¹⁰

As Pinn reviews the book in sections, he notes the attention that R. Drew Smith and Corwin Smidt give to the trend with which black churches' public life is being lived out in a duality of this world versus other worldly issues. According to Smith and Smidt, church activism is heavily tied to electoral politics and is strongly influenced not by a general critique of American political practices and positions, but rather by the resources of a particular congregation.¹¹

The second section of *New Day Begun* contains four chapters that are collectively concerned with black churches, civic identity and civic responsibility. In this section, Pinn illuminates the work of David Howard-Pitney's essay that speak to the ways the black church participate in civil religion, and in what sense has their participation served to shape American civil religion. For this purpose, the black church tradition engages civil religion to the extent that it enables hope for the future in general and in terms of the needs of black America in particular. Civil religion according to Pinn is the way that God or God through the actions of the church is involved in history.¹²

According to Pinn, the final section addressed the heated issues of community development corporations and faith-based initiatives. Pinn admits that while the book does not take a stand on the issue of Community Development Corporations (CDC), it does represent both sides of the argument noting the ways in which CDC's and the faith-

¹⁰Anthony B. Pinn, Book Review, "*New Day Begun*", <http://www.jsr.fsu.edu/volume8/Pinn.htm>. (accessed September 15, 2011).

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

based initiatives allow churches of various sizes to more productively work within their communities.¹³

In the article, *Religion and Social Capital*, the author says that houses of worship build and sustain social capital—and social capital of more varied forms than any other type of institution in America. The authors says churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship provide a vibrant institutional base for civic good works and a training ground for civic entrepreneurs. In fact, religious faith provides a moral foundation for civic regeneration. Faith gives meaning to community service and good will, forging a spiritual connection between individual impulses and great public issues. Religion helps people to internalize an orientation to the public good. And because faith has such power to transform lives, faith-based programs can enjoy success where secular programs have failed.¹⁴

The article goes on to say that in politics, policy makers have begun to address openly the central role of religious institutions and religious faith in healing social ills. Meanwhile, religion and values weigh heavy on the minds of the American public. In the late 1990's there was a strong, steady, and unprecedented rise among Americans who cited the breakdown of family values or decline in morality as the nation's most pressing problem. In virtually every poll, more people cited spiritual ills as a top problem than cited drug abuse, or the health care system, or broken schools, or poverty. As the American public and their religious institutions seek to reconcile after decades of

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Religion and Social Capital, <http://www.bettertogether.org/pdfs/Religion.pdf> (accessed September 2011).

growing alienation, the time is ripe to translate this increasing interest in spirituality into complementary work for community renewal.¹⁵

Speaking to the hope of social and political activism as part of the life of the church, the article articulates that secular leaders—whether from government, the academy, organized philanthropy, or the non-profit world must challenge their assumption that religious organizations are primarily preoccupied with other worldly concerns and recognize how deeply these organizations are embedded in the civic life of congregants and their communities. This is a critical point in understanding that many of the most divisive political issues have an explicitly religious dimension. In some cases, this is because adherents of a particular faith seek scriptural exhortations for their beliefs—about abortion, or homosexuality. In other cases, it is because faith communities overlap with value communities—for example, racism is a particular threat to African Americans (many of whom worship in historically black churches), and gun control is a particular concern for those who worship in the conservative congregations of the South.¹⁶ Given that religion is entangled with many of the public issues of the day, there is a role for religious institutions to play in helping Americans to overcome the incivility, distrust, animosity, and sometimes even violence that these issues have engendered.¹⁷

Neela Banerjee, contributing writer for the New York Times says that a tug of war existed inside black churches over who speaks for African-Americans and what role should the church play in politics. In the March, 2005 article entitled *Black Churches*

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

Struggle Over Their Role in Politics. Banerjee says that the struggle, mainly among black Protestants, is taking place in pulpits, church conventions, on op-ed pages and on the airwaves. It seems that at the heart of the debate is whether the church should get involved in issues such as job creation, education, affirmative action, prison reform and health care, or should the church place more emphasis on issues of personal morality. At the end of the day, the real issue centers on who and not what. For most of the pastors interviewed, concern was raised more often about who could speak for the black church and not the issues that confront the parishioners who attend those churches.

In *Mobilizing Hope: Inspired Activism for a Post-Civil Rights Generation*, Adam Taylor says that people must reclaim their own story within the context of the larger community. He says that reclaiming your own story is both an act of empowerment and self-actualization that involves a deliberate process of reflecting on the experiences that have shaped your identity and influenced your life the most. Taylor goes on to say that our stories are more than simple testimonies, which describe our personal encounters with God's grace and goodness. Taylor says that public stories link our personal stories to the stories of others in order to inspire collective action.¹⁸

In quoting Ganz, Taylor says "Public narrative is leadership through which we translate values into action: engaging heart, head, and hands." Public narratives weave together Aristotle's three components of rhetoric—logos, pathos, and ethos. The logos is the logic of the argument; the pathos is the feeling the argument evokes; and the ethos

¹⁸Adam Taylor, *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post-Civil Rights Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 26.

comes from the credibility of the person who makes the argument. Shocking statistics and compelling facts are almost never enough to evoke emotion and trigger empathy.¹⁹

According to Taylor, we should never be afraid to articulate the ways our stories of self have shaped our identity. The goal the community and congregation are called to achieve forms the story of us. Community stories include the challenges we have faced collectively and why we stood up to them based on our shared values, religious traditions and political and economic beliefs.²⁰

Getting involved in political and social activism is not new; it has been a part of salvation history since the beginning of time. Political and social activism happens as a result of individual stories becoming *collective stories* and embraced by the whole of the community. Take for instance; we repeat community stories as folk sayings, popular songs, religious rituals and community celebrations, such as Easter, Passover, and the Fourth of July. Moses chose Israel's story over Egypt's story in accepting God's assignment to free the Israelites from the bondage of slavery. Like Moses, the *us* for people of faith must always be aligned with God's special concern for the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalized. Therefore, no matter our station in life, our *us* is always inclusive of and concerned about God's chosen *us*.²¹

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 27.

²¹Ibid., 28.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical Foundation

It is the purpose of this presentation to demonstrate why the Bible requires the church and Christians to be politically active. In so doing, the writer will answer anticipated objections from both sides of the religious-divide. From the religious side, there are some Protestant clerics who will maintain that the aim of the church is to ensure salvation and matters not directly related to religion are extraneous to this purpose; moreover, there may be those who will maintain that, since Martin Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation on the grounds that salvation is through faith alone—not through faith and good works as the Catholic Church maintained—preaching that demands political activism amounts to false doctrine, in that it claims we are commanded to perform good works. To this, the writer will reply that the Bible does not speak only of the need for salvation, important as that need may be, but that both the Old and New Testament stress the importance of living in this world and of respecting other human beings, as was taught, for example, by Jesus. The purpose of political action is not to gain salvation, which can only come after death, but to live a life of closeness to God and humanity.

On the other side, there may be secularists who will maintain that church-inspired political activism may violate the principle of separation of church and state, and that, at

any rate, since reasonable persons may interpret the Bible in very different terms, persons who claim biblical authority for their view can, and do, take positions in direct opposition to one another on the very same issues.

In refuting the first claim, we may say that there is nothing in the American tradition of church and state that forbids church leaders from urging their flock to behave morally, and to proclaim moral witness. Marilyn Mellowes, producer of the forthcoming documentary for PBS on faith and politics in the United States, appropriately says in this regard: "As you look at the history, it is just a historical fact that while the founding fathers may have wanted to separate the institutions of church and state, they did not want to separate religion and politics. These are two different things. It is fair to say they were wary that religion could incite conflict and on the other hand they saw religion was essential to the composition of a moral citizenry."¹

Regarding the Bible being open to conflicting interpretations, the writer is not suggesting that it be used as a basis for political activism on a particular issue because of a single verse, or several verses whose meaning can be disputed. Instead he is speaking of matters where there is a solid body of biblical authority, in both the Old and New Testaments. Thus, the Bible can afford us no guidance on issues like abortion, stem-cell research, and global warming, and anyone who claims the contrary is clearly stretching the meaning of the scriptural text. But on matters relating to social justice and compassion for the poor, the weak, and the afflicted, both Testaments are very clear in their message.

¹Samuel G. Freedman's Editorial, "Faith and Politics, a Rocky Romance," *The New York Times*, October 3, 2010.

In the Old Testament, the practice of social justice was mandated for the Israelites if they are to be truly worthy of their status as God's people, while in the New Testament, Jesus teaches that individual righteousness is more a matter of behavior towards one's fellow man than of being a member of the priestly caste.

There is a clear biblical basis for political activism on the part of the congregation, but the pastor must always be careful, in citing the Bible in this connection, to follow accepted principles of Protestant scriptural interpretation. Bernard Ramm, for example, maintains, "All practical lessons, all applications of scripture, all devotional material, must be governed by general protestant hermeneutics."² He goes on to offer as an illustration: "In the intense desire to find something practical or devotional in scripture, we are in danger of obscuring the literal or genuine meaning of the passage. It may sound harsh so to speak, but not too infrequently a devotional message is conjured up from the scriptures by a method of interpretation which is nothing short of trifling and tampering with scripture."³

In the case of the New Testament, at least, this matter of interpretation of the text and its application is complicated by the fact that Jesus and the first Christians lived under an oppressive society—that of the Roman Empire—totally unlike that of the present day United States where participation by the citizens in the democratic political process is taken for granted. A case in point would be Jesus' view of politics according to Matthew 22:16-21 which relates what happened when the Pharisees sought to entrap him:

²Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, Third Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 185.

³*Ibid.*, 186.

They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.
 ‘Teacher,’ they said... Tell us... what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘you hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s’, they replied. Then he said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’”⁴

This famous pronouncement, long known in the King James Version’s wording, “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s...” to persons who may not regularly read the Bible, has come down as a statement of early Christian political attitudes, but what does it mean? The Oxford Annotated Bible, noting that Jesus’ enemies had asked him this question in order to trap him, comments: “If Jesus approved paying taxes he would offend nationalist parties; if he disapproved payment he could be reported as disloyal to the empire.”⁵

But as it is, this statement would seem to raise more questions than it answers. Thus, Jesus would seem to be saying that there is a secular political sphere, where one can behave loyally by paying one’s taxes, and a sacred sphere to which one can devote one’s soul. But the *loyalty* which is implied here would seem to be at odds with what we would understand as Christian political activism.

Jesus would appear to be laying down here what could be called the basic responsibility of the subject, or citizen, to pay taxes, so that, along with relevant passages in other New Testament books like Romans, the scriptural text can be seen as *not* condoning tax resistance. But apart from the recognition of the obligation to pay taxes, the New Testament would not appear to preclude other forms of political activism. In a

⁴Mt 22:16-21. (NIV) Hereafter all Scripture will be from the NIV version.

⁵*The Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1201.

sense, Jesus' entire ministry can be interpreted as a form of political activism, which is why his enemies sought to entrap him so that the Romans would deal with him before he had influenced too many minds.

Seen in another light, Jesus was not concerned with inciting opposition to the Roman authorities so much as with questioning the unjust behavior of many of his fellow Jews, who, as a people holy to God, had to hold themselves to a uniquely high standard of just conduct. Thus, as opposed to the idea of a division between the secular, or profane, and the holy, holiness and justice were to Jesus, as to the Old Testament, one and the same. In these respects, Jesus can be seen as following in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets whose mission was a form of political activism. Amos for example denounced the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel and called down judgment upon them, declaring:

They sell the righteous for silver, And the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor, As upon the dust of the ground. And deny justice to the oppressed.⁶

When Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, the sanctuary of the northern kingdom, told Amos to return to his home village in the southern kingdom of Israel, and not to prophesy anymore at Bethel, "Because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom," Amos defied him declaring: "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a Shepherd,... But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people of Israel.'"⁷

⁶Am 3:6-7.

⁷Am 7:3-15.

This passage is illustrative of two major biblical themes: first, the prophets did not fear speaking the truth to the powerful, and second, the prophetic calling was one that came from God and filled the person's spirit to speak despite the person's occupation or status. Thus, while Amos says here, literally, that he was no *prophet's son*, many scholars believe that the Hebrew phrase *son of a prophet*, actually referred to a member of a prophetic *guild*, whose members were trained to prophesy. What the Bible says, is *that* no one can be schooled to become a prophet but that the prophetic calling is a matter of the spirit, which comes only from God.

We are not suggesting here, of course, that either the pastor or the congregants can expect to receive direct communications from God, or that there can be in our day persons who are specifically charged to do *the Lord's work*. Scripture serves only as an example, and one is not necessarily expected to behave in the manner of inspired persons in biblical narrative but only to absorb the moral teaching contained in the narrative. An example which would illustrate this point very well is the account of Jesus' behavior at the entryway of the Temple when he overturned the tables of the money changers and chased them out. Just as there is no parallel to the Temple in our modern American society, so Christians are not advised to fight corruption and avarice by going on this type of rampage.

Strictly speaking, changing money and selling animals for sacrifice in the outermost court of the Temple did not violate Jewish Law because this peripheral portion of the Temple was open to everyone, including non-Jews, and did not have any sanctity attached to it. But to Jesus, who demands that his fellow Jews be accountable to a much higher moral standard, even if it meant going beyond the letter of the Law, this was

reprehensible. In other words, as a pious Jew, Jesus believed in the law, but he also maintained that if Jews were truly to behave as God's people, they had to go beyond the law to ensure that they were spiritually as well as ritualistically pure.

This is the lesson which is to be derived from the story of Jesus' overtaking the table of the money changers, because their presence while not in violation of the letter of Jewish Law, nevertheless reflected the extent to which the Temple and its priests had become dependent upon the revenues derived from sacrifices instead of serving as a place where all Jews, even the penniless could go for purposes of prayer and atonement. (Jewish law allowed the poor, who could not afford to purchase the beasts required for various types of sacrifices, to offer up birds instead, which explains their presence in the cages of the vendors, but it is conceivable that even these would have cost too much for the very poorest.)

"The point here," writes John C. Haughey, author of *The Poor Use of Money:*

Personal Finance in the Light of Christian Faith,

Is that trusting in money was a way which coexisted with a religious way of life because it was not seen as an accommodation of faith to money or as a contradiction of a faith that claimed to trust Yahweh alone. This way of life was embedded in most of Israel's structures, even in its most sacred one, the temple... The group that should have been recognized this for what it was were the religious professionals, but since they enjoyed the best of both worlds, they were wither unable or unwilling to see their own compromised position. But also, when it was exposed," Haughey adds ominously, "they were adamant to eradicate any one whose words skewered their ambivalence."⁸

This instance should serve as an excellent example of what is meant when we speak of biblical texts serving as a basis for political activism only on the basis of

⁸John C. Haughey, *The Holy Use of Money: Personal Finance in Light of Christian Faith*, Revised Edition (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989), 18-19.

thorough exegesis. Clearly, no one is suggesting that we behave in the precise manner as Jesus and the Old Testament prophets, just as no one would suggest that we go about clad like them in robe and sandals. This approach to the critical analysis of biblical texts is designed to extract true meaning from the thought behind the words. It is also in line with Ramm's hermeneutical principle to the effect that "The Bible emphasizes the inner spirit rather than the outward religious cloak."⁹

In the case of the story of Jesus' chasing the money changers from the temple, we have seen that although we do not have the temple today, appropriate interpretation of this passage would call attention to the corrupting effect that the profit motive continues to exercise upon our own institutions, including our religious institutions. This text therefore calls upon all of us who consider ourselves believers to be wary of this corrupting effect of money and wealth, especially when they are allied with power.

We have therefore seen, on the basis of such texts as that involving Jesus and the denarius coin that the Bible recognizes a legitimate sphere of state authority and of laws. This biblical recognition is necessary for the proper governance of a state; therefore, Christians are under the same obligation to obey as other subjects or citizens. We have also seen, through such texts as those relating to the behavior of Amos at the sanctuary of Bethel and of Jesus with the money changers that the Bible demands that one denounce not only illegitimate or corrupt state policies and institutions but also established religious institutions aligned with them. But does the Bible sanction political activism, and the assuming of political roles by believers where matters like social justice or human rights are not involved?

⁹Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 187.

We have already said that there are certain pressing issues, such as abortion and global warming, on which the Bible, considered the sole source of authority by most Protestants is silent and anyone who claims otherwise is distorting the scriptural text to make a particular verse fit a *strait-jacket* of preconceived meaning. (For example, the Roman Catholic Church, which bases most of its opposition to abortion upon extra-biblical sources, nevertheless claims to find a possible significance in the Greek translation of an obscure Hebrew verse, in the body of Old Testament Mosaic laws, relating to the unintentional injury to a pregnant woman's fetus.) Here, most mainline Protestant denominations would agree that American citizens have the right, and perhaps even the obligation, to express their views on such pressing issues, but it would be inappropriate to claim a religious basis for one's position, except in terms so broad as to be little more than truisms (i.e. God urges us to choose life, or God entrusted the Earth to Adam as its steward).

What we would call Christian political activism, therefore, would involve matters like social and economic justice, which are unambiguous and recurring themes throughout the Bible; but what of the holding of political office by believers? Here, the New Testament offers little guidance, for the time of the writing of its latest books; Christians were still a small persecuted sect who was not very likely to be invited to hold office in the very Roman state that was persecuting them. But the Old Testament is more instructive in this regard.

In Genesis 41, after Joseph had successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dream regarding the impending famine, Pharaoh recognized that he was the only man with the ability to make the necessary preparations to save the people:

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, 'Make way!' Thus, he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.¹⁰

In commenting upon the significance of the signet ring given to Joseph by Pharaoh, John J. Davis characterizes it as "The royal seal..., with which Joseph could transact affairs of the state in the name and with the authority of the crown."¹¹ Pharaoh, in other words, is handing over to Joseph all his day-by-day authority, so that, as he himself says to Joseph, "Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."¹² Joseph's assumption of high office, like his adoption of Egyptian garb is essential for the resolution of the story, in order that his brothers would not recognize him when they come to Egypt to buy grain, and the prophecy contained his early dream of his brothers bowing before him in homage might be fulfilled. Referring to the designation that Bible scholars have given to the author of this part of the Joseph story, Pauline A. Viviano observes: "Joseph is completely drawn into the Egyptian royal court...His new name and the fact he marries the daughter of an Egyptian priest cause no problems for the Yahwist, who simply records it as part of Joseph's new position in Egypt."¹³

Joseph, of course, comes to assume this position as part of God's plan to ensure the survival of Israel by establishing Egypt as a land where they can come to buy grain.

¹⁰Gn 41: 41-43.

¹¹John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 276.

¹²Gn 4:40.

¹³Pauline A. Viviano, *Genesis, Old Testament 2, Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1985), 115.

One might note parenthetically that while the Egyptian famine could readily be explained as a result of one of the periodic failures of the Nile flood, the fact that the famine was widespread as far off as Canaan would suggest something more cosmic was at work. Joseph maintains as much after revealing himself to his brothers when he urges them not to fear punishment for having sold him to Egypt. However, on the second occasion, shortly after Jacob's death, when Joseph repeats this assurance to his brothers, they were fearful that they were kept alive only out of consideration for their father while he still lived, Joseph says: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."¹⁴ Joseph's phrase *many lives*, without his specifying *Israel* this time, would suggest that one purpose of his assuming office in Egypt was to save the lives of Egyptians as well as those of his own people.

The similar theme of a devout Israelite assuming office in a pagan land is to be found by Daniel, where it is said of the ruler of Babylon in Daniel 2:48: "Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men." Here, as was the case with Joseph, Daniel was granted this authority due to his correct interpretation of the ruler's dream. However, in this case the king demanded that Daniel first tell him his own dream, cleverly recognizing that any *wise man* can offer interpretation of a dream, but only a person inspired by God can, like Daniel, describe to him his own dream.

¹⁴Gn: 50:20.

We might give the last word to Peter J. Gomes, who writes with authority on the matter of the relationship between biblically based faith and Christian action. “The public nature of the Bible is meant to have an impact upon public life,” Dr. Gomes writes,

...People should not be surprised, therefore, that Christians always want to translate their understanding of scripture and its demands into public lives that Christians lead. The Bible is meant to play a role in society, as are Christians...and working out the proper relationship between the public dimensions of one’s biblical faith and one’s citizenship in a community that does not necessarily share or appreciate that faith is part of the inevitable and uneasy burden that every responsible Christian must shoulder.¹⁵

We have sought to draw a distinction between those issues, particularly ones concerning matters like poverty, and social and economic justice, where the Bible mandates activism on the part of believers, and those issues on which the Bible is either silent or ambiguous. Where the subject of homosexuality is concerned, for example, Peter J. Gomes writes, on the basis of his careful study of relevant texts in both the Old Testament and the New, that “The biblical writers never contemplated a form of homosexuality in which loving, monogamous, and faithful persons ought to live out the implications of the gospel with as much fidelity to it as any heterosexual believer.”¹⁶

Gomes goes on to declare, “The only ground on which I could stand in this particular instance was religious ground,” and “as a Christian, and as a homosexual, by proclaiming a vision of the gospel that was inclusive rather than exclusive.”¹⁷ This effort,

¹⁵ Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1996), 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

was greeted with widespread criticism, and “Many of my critics, chiefly from within the religious community, asked if I read the same Bible they did...”¹⁸

The point here is that one does not need to agree with this author’s view that the Bible can be interpreted as endorsing gay relationships; rather, it is that persons who read *the same Bible* can construe its message differently, depending upon the personal outlook which they bring to the text. Thus, it would be just as subjective to interpret the Bible as being pro-gay because Jesus somehow represents inclusiveness as it would be to adopt the more traditional homophobic interpretation of Scripture based on Old Testament laws and verses in Paul’s Epistles. In short, one does not need to agree with this author’s personal interpretation of scripture as being somehow favorable to committed gay relationships to accept his view that the “Relationship among the Bible, sexuality, and the church as it has impact upon the moral case for or against homosexuality is now one of the most contentious topics in the modern history of the church.”¹⁹ Consequently, while homosexuality and issues relating to it, like gay marriage, may constitute a fruitful field for discussion by scholars of biblical texts, it should not serve as a subject for the pastor’s preaching to the congregation.

The same, as has already been indicated, would be the case with environmental issues, despite some scattered biblical verses, such as certain of the laws in Deuteronomy, which could be view as implying respect for the environment. For example, early agricultural societies needed to find ways to enhance the land’s productivity by such means as leaving fields’ fallow and avoiding excessive deforestation. While regulations

¹⁸Ibid., 166.

¹⁹Ibid., 340.

of this type may be of interest to biblical scholars, they do not make the Bible into the Farmer's Almanac. In other words, there are pertinent contemporary issues on which persons may legitimately disagree when a concise scriptural position may not be available, particularly if one wishes to make it the source of political activism and the Bible has something unique to say, and says it unequivocally and forcefully.

As previously stated, the Bible considers social justice to be a true test of heartfelt faith, especially in an age when society is divided into a handful of wealthy persons and a great mass of poor people and slaves. In order for Israel to prove they were God's people, they had to be different from the other nations in exhibiting compassion for the poor, the afflicted, the widow and the orphan.

Christianity has historically recognized the importance of social justice; however, since the Reformation many Protestants have come to accept the view that wealth, if accumulated through honest labor was good. They further believe that those who earned wealth honestly were under no obligation to show concern for those who, presumably because they were lazy, had been less successful in enriching themselves. "Most Protestants in the West, particularly in the United States...", writes Gomes, "Have simply refused to accept that what Jesus and the New Testament have to say about wealth and has anything to do with them. So thoroughly have they adopted as their own the 'wealth as blessing' concept as an inheritance from Calvinism, and so difficult is it to account for earthly success as anything other than God's direct blessing upon the individual, the church, and the state, that to suggest otherwise is either heresy or treason, or both."²⁰

²⁰Ibid., 303.

Even though our American society may be more egalitarian than those of the ancient Near East, when the Old and New Testament books containing our Bible were compiled, social and economic injustice are still very much with us. Therefore, the congregation must be exhorted to seek justice, in the spirit of Amos, who proclaimed:

You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground...you trample on the poor and force him to give you grain... You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts... Seek good not evil, That you may live then the Lord Good Almighty will be with you....²¹

Historical Foundation

The historical foundations that speak to political activism in the church are grounded in the history of Protestant Christianity as well as America, slavery, the reforms of Martin Luther, the message of the Apostle Paul, Civil Rights, Jesus Christ, and social revolutionary political activism. By exploring these subjects, one can get an idea of the historical background of the church and how it functions within this background. It is important to remember one's history in terms of the present and what it can lend to the present. Although much church practice has remained the same through adherence to tradition through the centuries, history is something that comes in signs of progress and advancement. Philosophically, however, history is also the study of things which remain the same. The current section mixes the history of African-Americans in the United States and the history of Christianity.

One of the earliest people to put Christianity into an Evangelical tradition was the Apostle Paul. Paul in his epistles builds on the theme that civil government functions are

²¹ Am 5:7-14.

ordained by God. He said we must obey the institutional powers because God established them for our good. This was a radical departure from the spirit of separation and the non-tolerance of Peter. His epistles contained definite language regarding good citizenship while discouraging any attitude toward revolting against constituted authorities of the state. John does not bear the same sentiments as Paul; perhaps this could be traced to his affection toward Christ and the injustice Christ received. The early church wrestled with its role in dealing with civil authorities. Christ acknowledged that we must respect and provide tribute to the government, John's anti-government affiliation, Peter's refusal to cooperate, and Paul's endorsement of the establishment of government authorities. This recognition has caused a historical tragedy in defining what position the church should take in collaborating with the government. The concern still remains; should the church engage in government affairs.

Leadership was shown through Paul at the synagogues by planting the seeds of religion in many different cultures. He left a definitive and lasting impression on Christian history and the way Jesus was thought of by the mass numbers that he was able to convert in Greece and Asia Minor. Through his wide travels, leadership, purposeful indifference to persecution, strategic management of variables, and the expostulation and sometime exhortation of the idea, still generally applied, that Christians cannot impose an ethnicity upon those who come into the faith, Paul the Apostle spread the word of Christianity, setting a whole new precedent for participating in Jesus.

It is also arguable that the prevailing conception of Jesus through strategic management principles is not unheard of, because Jesus was a strategic planner as well, who planned to re-establish the kingdom. "There is nothing inherently unChristian about

traditional strategic planning! Like many other tools and processes, it is morally neutral—it all depends on how you use it. Typically, strategic planning for the church is done by a Strategic Planning Committee; a group usually dominated by businessmen, and does not adequately involve large numbers of church members”.²²

The Holy Spirit filled the Apostles, thus triggering benevolence among those present at Pentecost. After the outpouring of the spirit during the Pentecost, the church emerged and developed its own system of government to cater to the needs of its disciples. The gospel writers portrayed the life of Christ as serving and liberating the poor and needy. The Pentecostal experience in Jerusalem caused the church to pay close attention to the social needs of those present.

The gift of the Holy Spirit prompted the Apostles to address and fulfill the new concerns of social discrimination as they followed the mandates of Christ’s mission on earth. The distribution of the benevolence mandated that deacons were appointed to perform various responsibilities over this business. The early church had to develop a system that created a congregational structure. The Christian church knew its obligation to ensure the needs of the community were met, and a communal support system was provided. The forming of this system caused conflicts among some disciples but the distribution of benevolence became the first welfare agency of the church.

J. R. Schneider in his book *The Good of Affluence* looks at early Christianity in historical terms, Schneider writes, “I have offered a theological vision for Christians seeking to live with integrity in a culture of capitalism. Contrary to widespread opinion, it

²²Church Development (2010) [http://www.churchleader.net/Transforming/Church Development /tabid/81/Default.aspx](http://www.churchleader.net/Transforming/Church%20Development/tabid/81/Default.aspx) (accessed September 2010).

seems that there is a distinctly Christian way to be affluent... the biblical narrative gives forth a constructive, coherent vision for rich people of faith... this vision consists of both affirmation and challenge.”²³ That is, the author sees as a possibility a Christian in a world where poverty and class struggle has taken precedent over duty to the poor. From this perspective he sees an eternal political clash of rich and poor that has been going on throughout all history. This is preferred to a situation in which the rich are seen in terms of their compassionate duty while still reconciling their affluent position in society and justifying it theologically and in terms of ethics, which differ with individuals in terms of ethical imperatives and senses of responsibility.

Schneider moves quickly from assessing the political system as it exists to an examination of biblical sources. He justifies and sets up his argument and main point, mentioned above, and then goes about attempting to prove this idea by offering biblical evidence from Genesis, Exodus, the life of Jesus, and the Parables to support his interpretation, or re-interpretation of the way wealth should be perceived within the capitalist system theologically. For example, when examining the life of Paul, the author stresses certain aspects that highlight his theories and show that Paul, besides establishing the evangelical tradition, also was an active fund-raiser. “Paul worked intensely to collect money for ‘the poor among the saints at Jerusalem...’ Considering the importance that Paul attaches to this mission, and also the stress on economic themes in Luke-Acts, it is very odd that Luke fails to mention either the poverty of the Jerusalem Church or Paul’s Great Collection.”²⁴

²³J. R. Schneider, *The Good of Affluence* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010).

²⁴*Ibid.*

The author also mentions the parable of the rich man who is hard of heart and does not support Christians, stating that this is not necessarily just because the man is wealthy, but is most likely more about his having a hard heart and not following rules of charity to share his wealth with others. The author quotes Johnson regarding this parable, stating,

The man had not only been rich and extravagant, he had been hard of heart. His wealth had made him insensitive to the law and the Prophets alike that the covenant demands sharing goods with the poor. The concrete expression of his rejection of the law was his neglect of the poor man at the gate.²⁵

Schneider also reassesses the life of Jesus in the work, stating that despite prevalent descriptions of a messianic nature about Jesus' austerity, this may also not necessarily be the whole picture. The author argues that "There was a Jesus whom Christian moral tradition has largely ignored. He was anything but austere. This Jesus was celebrative, he was the Son of Man who came eating and drinking with his lost people, now found. He lacked all moderation or pious restraint. He celebrated life with such intensity and abandon that it shocked members of the religious establishment."²⁶

As the church continued to evolve, it established its own governmental system to address issues of the church. The council at Jerusalem was the calling place to settle issues that the church would confront. The church became self-sufficient in supporting the needs of its disciples. It is the belief of the writer that the forming of the early church government prompted ways that began church and state separation. Although, the church never intended to struggle with civil government, they continued to disagree with the

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

thought of collaborating. As time went on, the idea of Jesus returning to earth became less popular and the religion shifted from being persecuted to being accepted, revitalized, and set in a system of official theology.

The idea of Christian culture at this point changed as it was determined universally by council what was to be thought of Jesus; whether or not he was human or divine, submissive to the idea of the father, etc. It is easy for any culture to take the parables of Jesus and do virtually anything with them, since many of the parables are so open-ended. Some of these confusions were cleared up by councilor definitions, and others were added. All of the gospel writers had a different agenda in presenting the life of Jesus; this is perhaps the main reason apart from the natural flux of a changing society that the understanding of Jesus was capable of changing from age to age: the definitive texts on his message are often contradictory and are fairly open to interpretation.

Later in history, during and after the Schism and the Protestant Reformation, it became clear that Jesus was capable of being understood differently by different cultural subsets of the Christian religion. In one given age, the life and meaning of Jesus could have many different understandings. Luther proposed that repentance was a more direct action that did not require the intercession of priests, and saw a new world where he could make the Catholic church change to a world where Christianity would become a personal and inward religion rather than one that was outward. Though Christianity was initially a religion of rebellion, many labeled heretics have been called to trial and threatened with burning for having their own understandings of Jesus. This concept of whom (and widely differing images of whom, along with whether or not these images

were appropriately non-idolatrous) became more and more disputed, polarized, and politicized as time progressed.

There also exist those who have provided interesting commentaries on various political and cultural shifts in Christian history, particularly in the texts of Dante and Saint Augustine. In Dante, the growing polarity of what used to be a fairly universal combination of good and evil became clearly differentiated in the *Divine Comedy*, in which the author clearly put down dividing lines between heaven, hell, and the relatively new concept of purgatory. Dante also represented the cultural and vernacular application of Christian culture that had previously been mostly constrained to more academic Latin texts. Specifically, in Dante's *Inferno*, one can see the use of culture in collusion with Christianity in terms of local or personal metaphor and symbolism given to Christian themes. For example, Dante's narrator recalls in the first Canto that he spent many days past the prime of his life in a sort of spiritual trap or doldrums represented by a dark forest. He finds that he must walk through the threatening wilderness alone, and despairs his condition, saved for the fact that he sees at the end of the territory a sunny and gentle-looking hill in the distance. This can be construed to represent Dante's casual conception of the afterlife as he saw it from a cultural perspective that was earth-bound. He frequently used morbid imagery to describe the valley or forest from which he emerges, and sees the hill as the distant comfort and hope of salvation.

Saint Augustine also uses a personal metaphor to draw connections between culture and Christianity, and comment on the evolving combination of the two that continues into the present. He uses confession to draw these links and make them explicitly related to his present, when he mentions stealing from his parents as a young

man and feeling shame for his actions. Augustine was concerned with the fact that he seemed to gain satisfaction from actions that were counterpoised by a bitter feeling of shame and guilt. He therefore saw Christianity as a sort of cultural corrective measure that could be applied on an extremely personal level. And in relation to the abovementioned terms of division that are found in Dante, there are also parallels in Augustine: for example, the author divides pleasure of the body and soul, and proscribes a basically moral impulse of being careful that fulfilling pleasure in oneself does not take something away from others as well as from oneself.

Two major works of Augustine give the reader an insight into his thoughts as it relates to his own personal philosophy, *Confession*, and *City of God*. Augustine dismisses the notion of ignoring the world, and the providential hand of God in human affairs. The work in the *City of God* describes Augustine's understanding that Christians live in both worlds. All the events of our lives are testaments of God's will. The activities in our lives have been designed for our involvement in the City of God. Augustine saw the universe as God's City. "In the City of God he traces the story of the human race from the creation of Adam and Eve in the region of Tigris-Euphrates River, through the election and political development of the Jewish people, the ascendancy of the Greek city-states and of the Assyrian and Macedonian Empires, the rise of Rome, and the birth of Christ."²⁷

The author also notes that, "The establishment of the Catholic Church, until the shaking of the Christian Roman Empire in A.D. 410 when Alaric the Goth sacked the city of Rome. Here too he sees God in his working in secular history, and a first through the Christian Empire, to salvation bring about the salvation and fulfillment of human

²⁷ Saint Augustine, <http://www.religiousfoundation.org> (accessed October 2010).

individuals.”²⁸ In addition, it is noted that, “The salvation history of humankind as told in the Bible was accepted by Augustine for what it was: a sacred history of God’s love for human beings and of the way to happiness.”²⁹

However, Augustine saw the City of God emerging in the life of Christians. The world we must live in is consumed with issues that life offers, yet at the same time believers are preparing for the eternal city. Neo classicism or the revival of the sense of rebirth of humanism and reason in the Renaissance made the Enlightenment one of the main key features, in terms of a revival of these ideals and a transformation from focusing only on God to focusing on humans as being divine. This represents Enlightenment and scientific thought and endeavor.

Also, “In the wake of the Atlantic revolutions, social activists in Europe and the Americas considered the possibility that the ideals of freedom and equality might have further implications as yet unexplored. They turned their attention especially to the issues of slavery and women’s rights.”³⁰ Religion had previously focused more on providing mysteries than it had in providing proofs, but a new spirit of inquiry represented a different paradigm. In this new paradigm, questioning was not a matter of dissent to be singled out for punishment, but rather a way in which to inquire about one’s surroundings and circumstances from a scientific perspective that sought answers in the form of demonstrable proofs and processes. “Scientific reasoning grew more systematic. Two particularly influential styles of thinking are illustrated in the work of the English

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ F. Armesto, *The World* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009).

experimenter Bacon and the French philosopher Descartes... Bacon prized observation above tradition.”³¹ There were great transformations in the basis of society at this time, because people started to transform the way they lived, thought, and worshipped.

People of this time may have seen corruption in church practices that were being seen in a fusion of economic and religious systems, and they may have seen how they might have been counter-productive to what the new Enlightenment spirit was saying was the true nature of reason in terms of individuality and enlightenment. They may have seen purity in an old kind of reason that existed before the excesses that were seen in the present, or may have been more forward-oriented. They may have been induced to reject tradition, or, more likely, to hope that tradition would change, by seeing the Enlightenment as personal and inward rather than outwardly-directed.

The abusive power of the papacy caused Martin Luther to question the supreme absolutes that man imposed discounting scriptural teachings. Indulgences became a system perhaps adopted from the Roman government as a means to support the work of the church. The Roman Catholic Church had a clear demarcation of the Roman government but in many ways resemble their practices. Martin Luther became outraged that laity had paid money for what was theirs by right as a gift from God. Confession of sins was made and a priest would give them forgiveness of sins by presenting their plenary indulgences of goods. This payment claimed they no longer had to repent for their sins. Luther saw this as misleading and dishonest. Luther was compelled to expose this fraud and issues that clearly were contradictions in the scripture.

³¹ Ibid.

The collaboration occurred between religious and civil authorities during this period, and the church was used as a money-laundering scheme. Pope Leo X was a smart political strategist; he built alliances with the civil government to maintain control. He surrounded himself with close family members and placed his family members in key positions throughout the Holy Roman world to ensure the continuity of his papacy. Pope Leo X helped to make Rome a cultural center of the Renaissance, but at the expense of the church. Within two years of being pope, he had emptied the coffers, and his plan to rebuild Saint Peters led to the abuse of indulgences (selling God's forgiveness of sins to raise money).

Martin Luther became fed up with the lost identity of the church that he published and nailed the 95 Theses on the doorpost of Castle Church Wittenberg, Germany in the Holy Roman Empire. Martin Luther denounced the practices and challenged anyone to a scholarly public debate at the University of Wittenberg to justify the issues he nailed on the doorpost.

Luther perhaps wondered if the church corruption was systematic that no one was ready to take him on. Luther's action caused him to be removed from the church and he spent the rest of his time on house arrest. History has prevailed in Luther's favor that his interpretation and actions were right. The church mandate became the central focus of the church true mission on earth. Luther saw that the church was moving away from the biblical teaching, which resulted in the church moving toward secularization. It is always of concern that the church must maintain its primary focus of saving souls, and not being influenced by the world systems that shifts the Christian Church mandates.

The reformation caused the emerging of Protestantism. Protesting took on a new light; the medieval church of Jesus Christ began to become a reform movement of balance. Therefore, reform of the church was necessary to create the awareness that the chief mission of the church was a spiritual transformation. A spiritual transformation does not eliminate political awareness or involvement but enhances one's sensitivity of the mission of Christ.

The history of the church is not the only history; there is also the history of African-Americans in the United States, "On the other hand, members of minority groups tend to be constantly aware of the privileges denied to them. Persistent confrontation with a system of unearned privileges that benefits the dominant group serves as a constant reminder of their status as second-class citizens."³² The idea of white privilege deals specifically with prejudice; many themes are explored in examples which are primarily psychological and historical. People have tried to counteract white privilege with programs like Affirmative Action in some professional fields, but essentially, what is at fault is not in any industry or field specifically, but is a general taint on American society. This taint can be traced all the way back to slavery and its aftermath, when African-Americans were treated as less than human.

After slavery was abolished and African-Americans began to move freely about the country, they faced a whole new rank and file of racist policy designed to oppress them, and keep them down as a people. Over the years, there has been a general questioning and lessening of this racist and oppressive policy, but it still remains today in

³²S. Niehuis, "Helping White Students Explore White Privilege Outside The Classroom" *North American Journal of Psychology*, 2005.

many cases. Our knowledge can be heightened by the fact that it is not just an historical relationship, but also reflects on society as it exists today. It is also important to view sources like Katz Nelson in terms of how not to let history repeat itself. "Rankin fought assertively to make Jim Crow safe. He had reason to be anxious. The immense extension of federal largesse could threaten segregation. He keenly grasped that black veterans would attempt to use their new status to shift the balance against segregation."³³ All of the texts considered in this report have shown the main theme of how social forces that affect others can be destructive if they support policy that is racist in nature.

As history moved forward, African-American thinkers like Du Bois began to propose that the solution is to equalize the respect and opportunity for empowerment in both public and private consciousnesses. "Once the United States joined the war, many blacks, including Du Bois, sought to achieve civic gains as a corollary to their steadfastness. Seeking to turn ambivalence to instrumental change, he offered an historical argument... the history of race relations in the United States ...demonstrated a republican principle. In peacetime, black oppression remained unshaken."³⁴ There are also educational issues to consider. Differences in schools are mainly brought about by property tax rates and the economic conditions of the district. In a poor district, the children are less likely to get the help they really need from the educational system, and in a rich district, there is more than enough for everyone. "Since the sixties, when race relations held promise for the dawning of a new era, the issue has become one whose

³³Katz Nelson, *When Affirmative Action was White* (New York, NY: Norton Publishing, 2005).

³⁴*Ibid.*

persistence causes ‘problem fatigue’—resignation to an unwanted condition of life.”³⁵ The desegregation of the educational system after *Brown v. Board of Education* was a major step forward for equality, but it had to be shoehorned by the national government in many cases because some southern states refused to integrate their schools.

The year 1954 was another important date in terms of setting the stage for future events, but unlike the Cold War, these events were domestic to the United States, and involved the expanding movement of Civil Rights. The *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954 set the stage focusing on racial segregation, which, after separate schools were ruled inherently unequal addressed the problem of what remedies were required to overcome segregation. In this case, “Marshall and his colleagues argued well, stressing in their attack on *Plessey* that state-imposed segregation was inherently discriminatory and therefore a denial of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”³⁶ The justices involved in the case further stated that, in terms of African-Americans seeking equal educational opportunity, especially in the south, “To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”³⁷ Therefore, the language of the decision was very strong. Since the decision, the Supreme Court started playing a more vital role in educational policy formation, and at the same time Civil Rights has become a large public issue, not just for blacks, but also for women and the handicapped.

³⁵Claude M. Steele, “Race and the Schooling of Black Americans” *Atlantic Monthly* <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/race/steele.htm> (accessed November 2010).

³⁶J. T. Patterson, *Brown v Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2001).

³⁷*Ibid.*

History from this perspective is very important because of the continuance of Civil Rights struggles as desegregation spread through the south challenging the old Jim Crow system of oppression. Institutionalized oppression works in spheres other than court cases and populist social movements: it is pervasive in society, affecting housing, loan opportunities, and ghettoization, as well as the historical public pronouncement and later non-enforcement or repeal of equal opportunity and affirmative action laws. A law or bill is often removed from the personal experience of a member of an oppressed group. While the federal government has ceased to endorse many racist policies, it is still often difficult for residents of poor minority areas to have the equality and equity of access that the principles of this nation seem to point towards.

Institutionalized oppression involves the systematic use of political and socio-economic structures to maintain a particular group of people in a position of submission and silence. Discrimination is at the causal end of this oppression, and works as a way of enhancing and enacting the stereotypes of the dominant group which is seen sociologically to act as an *in-group* of unique and special individuals which perceives the oppressed people as an *out-group* of homogenous mass.

Despite positive trends, racism in the United States continues. The community or cultural level of minority communities in many areas of the United States is adversely affected by racism in that it is not recognized as going deeper than sensory perception allows, and often this perception is controlled in terms of stereotypes that are handed down through the mass-media. It is also difficult for the structural level of the group to gain power and depth when it is not assessed in a manner that respects essential human beings, but rather glosses over the surface and denies depth to political structures. On the

individual level, this drives a wedge between how the individual is perceived, in terms of one dimension, before they are actually essentially known.

Theological Foundations

There are many theological foundations based on religious Christian tradition upon which the church's political activism can be founded. The theological foundations for the church's call for activism include a duty to serve the poor backed by Saint Augustine, and the idea of the Christian Jesus as someone who wanted social revolution as well as Good Samaritan conduct. In assessing theological foundations for a call to activism, it is important to explore the relationship between social analysis and theology from different perspectives, most of which rely on the classification of systems to prove historical interrelationships between the church, society, politics, and stages of industrialization.

Most of these classifications have to do with implicit and explicit connections that emphasize degrees of solidarity found within a society in its treatment of the poor and downtrodden, especially in relation to their formation of social movements and political reactions to these movements. In terms of political systems, systems are classified as being traditional, liberal, and radical, and seek to align these systems with responses of governments to social issues. For example, one set of authors state that, "In response to social unrest within poor countries, a traditional response would strengthen the police and

military instruments to repress protesting social movements... the basic international order is accepted and defended militarily.”³⁸

In a liberal system, change would be more progressive than in a traditional system, and would be accommodated without instigating widespread or lasting fundamental changes—the authors relate liberalism to laissez-faire capitalism. And in a radical system, structural change is advocated in terms of modifying and correcting the unequal relationship between the rich and poor. The authors also classify their observations in terms of economic, social, and political development, which relates back to the church encyclicals which have shown a progression in the church from economic to political commentary in the twentieth century. Social analysis is stated to express a viewpoint which takes these classifications into consideration while providing a point of later theological judgment.

In terms of American interpretations of social analysis and social change, Martin Luther King can be highlighted as a source linking theology to political reality. King was an eloquent speaker and an articulate and literate presenter of information as well as a Christian minister and preacher (student of theology), and his words, both spoken and textual, influenced many people to come around to the nonviolent resistance tactics which he stressed in his dialogues, which also combined the economic towards a political shift. King argued against resignation, as it signified that the oppressor had already won, and also argued against violence, stating that a violent solution would create a monologue

³⁸Joe Holland, and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Concern, 2001).

rather than a dialogue, as well as leaving a legacy of chaos for the future generation who would have to deal with the repercussions of violent acts and behavior in the present. Martin Luther King's teachings are widely respected and eloquently presented, and continue to impact the social and political dynamic of race relations today by encouraging individuals to renounce resignation and violence and practice nonviolent resistance, a position also advocated by the church. It is important to take ancient and modern sources into consideration.

King states that oppressed people may choose to acquiesce to their oppressor, and accept their role as oppressed subjects without questioning the morality of their situation in a way that encourages activity. He states that many of the Egyptian slaves who were called upon by Moses to deliver themselves from their situation were so used to being slaves that they actually did not want to go; their condition had become habitual to them and they actually began to believe their oppressor. King sees this acquiescence to the oppressor as an unproductive and cowardly solution to the problem; although the individual may find comfort, s/he will not find freedom, and will wind up reinforcing the situation of oppression by showing the oppressor that s/he has already won. This is a strong foundation for activism.

As mentioned above, Holland and Henriot display in their text an alignment towards social analysis from a systems perspective; that is, they classify historical and social periods as they are perceived to be related to conceptual ideologies, and then balance these ideologies in terms of reactions by the church and response-based paradigms which suggest the road to be taken in theoretical terms in opposition to one or many types of ideological systems.

The authors divide society in terms of capitalism into three distinct categories and in linear temporal order: those of laissez-faire industrial capitalism, social welfare industrial capitalism, and national security industrial capitalism. In the first system which existed when the industrial revolution was in full swing, the rights of the poor were oppressed, only began to be outlined in terms of benevolence during the second system, and fell again to oppression (this time global) in the third system.

According to Holland and Henriot, this third stage of national security industrial capitalism requires a radical response from the church in terms of changing essential structures and perspectives to highlight a better basis for solidarity between human beings that works on a global scale. As the authors state, “The internationalization of capital has destroyed one of the features that made social welfare capitalism a relatively benevolent phase. That is, it has upset the national balance of power between capital and labor, allowing transnational capital to increase its control over national economies.”³⁹ And this requires a reaction from the church that is transformative rather than being traditionally supportive or liberally reactionary in its relationship to politics and theology.

Theologically, as time went on, the idea of Jesus returning to earth became less popular and the religion shifted from being persecuted to being accepted, revitalized, and set in a system of official theology. The idea of Christian culture at this point changed as it was determined universally by council what was to be thought of Jesus; whether or not he was human or divine, submissive to the idea of God, etc. It is easy for any culture to take the parables of Jesus and do virtually anything with them since many of the parables are so open-ended. Some of these confusions were cleared up by councilor definitions,

³⁹Ibid.

and others were added. All of the gospel writers had a different agenda in presenting the life of Jesus; this is perhaps the main reason, apart from the natural flux of a changing society, that the understanding of Jesus was capable of changing from age to age: the definitive texts on his message are often contradictory and are fairly open to interpretation.

Later, during and after the Schism and the Protestant Reformation, it became clear that Jesus was capable of being understood differently by different cultural subsets of the Christian religion; that even in one given age, the life and meaning of Jesus could have many different understandings. Luther proposed that repentance was a more direct action that did not require the intercession of priests, and saw a new world where he could make the Catholic church change to a world where Christianity would become a personal and inward religion rather than one that was outward. Though Christianity was initially a religion of rebellion, many labeled heretics have been called to trial and threatened with burning for having their own understandings of Jesus, the concept of whom (and widely differing images of whom, along with whether or not these images were appropriately non-idolatrous) became more and more disputed, polarized, and politicized as time progressed.

Kammer discusses the concept of standing with the poor in terms of papal statements that highlight the relationship of the church with the disadvantaged and downtrodden from a perspective that takes the New Testament teachings of Jesus into account as a message of benevolence and solidarity in humanity, rather than separateness that is driven by external circumstances involving society's codes and strictures. These papal statements highlight the role of the church as offering preferential treatment to the

poor and stemming from these scriptural beginnings, but the statement as a whole, Kammer points out, should not be taken to mean that the church is offering to put the poor on a pedestal or be exclusive of the rest of the society in any way in this preferential treatment.

Various statements, rather, express love and benevolence which is universal and part of the aforementioned solidarity, which seeks less to divide individuals than it does to bring them together through universal concepts of alignment based on church doctrine and teachings. As the author states, "Standing with the poor does not involve a class-struggle rejection of those not poor; but, as we shall see, this decision inevitably draws down upon those who stand with the poor not only the oppression experienced by the poor themselves but also a special bitterness reserved by the powerful for the prophets."⁴⁰ This makes an exploration of this idea complicated by the idea of the life of the poor as something that is expressive of the martyrdom of those who stand with them, and therefore may, wittingly or not, make class-struggle dynamics more a part of the equation than the author may realize. That is, to stand with the poor and be so explicitly brought down by them, or rather by those who oppress them, suggests a position that is far from an objective experience of the actual life of the poor, who may or may not be aware of the rituals of repression which make their experience, in the words of the author, so singularly bitter. From this perspective, the poverty of the church seems like more of a forced choice than a willing obligation. However, it is important to link politics and standing with the poor.

⁴⁰Fred Kammer, *Doing Faith Justice: An Introduction to Christian Social Thought* (New York, NY: Pauline Press, 1991).

The church's activism can also be theologically supported by Paul's letters to the Corinthians. At this point, Paul basically had to act politically in order to make sure that the Corinthian church was practicing correct conduct. Basically, what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians is responding to the fact that there are problems in Corinth with the Christian church he started there, and setting down a tone of friendly yet definitive decision and authority to get any churches in Corinth that may be erring back into the flock.

1 Corinthians is a letter, and as such, it starts out with a flowery rhetorical introduction before going on to tackle more serious subjects of dissention and disobedience in Corinth. Speculation is high among scholars as to the exact nature of the infidelities of Corinthian churches. But be it as a result of factionalism, Gnosticism, licentiousness, or a combination of these (and/or more) circumstances, Paul is strident in his epistle about returning Corinth to the right path of faith and devotion to Jesus Christ. Therefore, his epistle is both firm and conciliatory, and is rooted in real solutions to real problems in terms of management of the church in everyday affairs and quotidian, and one could add, political, notions.

Paul mentions the fact that the people of Corinth were thinking in too human terms, explicitly in 4:3, which section this report will address in terms of further analysis and comparison of the interpretations of the three scholars. Paul reproofs, corrects, and sets straight the Corinthians in this epistle on subjects like marriage, sexuality, church services, resurrection, and food that has been offered at places of idolatry, taking a hard line in some spots while still maintaining a compassionate tone overall throughout the epistle. "Schmithals in particular maintains the thesis that in Corinth there prevailed not only an enthusiasm of a general kind, but also a thoroughly worked out mythological

Gnosticism... the flesh of Jesus is rejected in dualistic terms... The dualism determines the libertinistic (sic) theory and the practical behavior resulting there from.”⁴¹

The church must draw from the stern example of Paul as well as the idea of charity to the poor. To avoid confusion, then, it is important for the church to draw distinctions and sets up a classification system of the poor, so that it is at least clear exactly about whom he is speaking when s/he names the poor. The definitions which there are provided are largely classical and do not have the same attenuation that is placed in other sections of a text on modern equivalencies (as when one speculates that Jesus is to be found in welfare distribution lines); nonetheless, perhaps the classical definitional structure in referring to the poor is made more clear by its presentation as a set of unchanging categories that includes widows, orphans, and the homeless.

It seems that this set of categories could be expanded, and to give theology as a background credit, theory does expand this definition by adding that although these are specific categories into which the poor can be placed, a more general definition concentrates on three factors. These factors are poverty, or the lack of economic or financial sufficiency to meet the daily needs of living and survival; powerlessness, in terms of the relationship to the poor to the oppressive powers which make life so bitter to them, and exclusion, which defines the boundaries of the poor as being alienated from a certain presentation of society or knowledge that could be beneficial to them, if only it did not seem at the same time through the words and actions of the oppressor to be so menacing. It is important that the politicized church reiterates the importance of the

⁴¹Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975).

example of Jesus, who provides a guiding principle for the dictates of standing with the poor by his own life, words, and actions, and expresses the inherent fairness and justice of making the decision to stand with the poor.

Taking these concepts within a context of existing religions within a culture that proposes a standard by which externalized or assimilated religions are judged in terms of their otherness, the formulation of a religion based on the separation of categories and the exclusion of other faiths is not so out of place in society. This further fuses society, religion, and theology together as it seeks to scapegoat and exclude other religions on the basis of there being one true faith, or one possible answer or combination of mysteries against which all other presentations are considered to be dangerous and/or heretic. If more self-actualized and consciously self-aware than that of the dominant culture, the role of myth as religion/violence is also more attenuated towards separation and conflict in the society, internally and externally. "One is perhaps most disqualified to investigate himself impartially. Nonetheless, many undertake to do just this. Certainly the inability of one to give a true estimate of his faithfulness in performing his stewardship of God should be self-evident."⁴²

Humanity first looked to religion to help to predict and explain the unexplainable. A hunter, for example, could only go so far by rational and scientific means, crafting a weapon, learning the routes and paths taken by different animals in different seasons, and learning how to stalk, trap, and kill game in groups and alone to support groups. The skill of the hunter had been given to him/her by the society of which s/he was a part.

⁴²J. Barber, *Christian Activism* <http://www.christianity.com/1133792/> (accessed November, 4 2010).

This hunter, however, when faced with the sudden disappearance of a certain type of animal, or of a group of animals, had no factually-based societal paradigm to fall back upon to explain the reasons for the loss of food and supplies: it is not because s/he crafted a weapon unskillfully or was unable to track the game, but because of something unforeseeable and unplanned, over which the human has no rational responsibility. Be they stymied hunter, planter, or the victim of a fire, the situation moves out of his/her control and the control of the rational society of knowledge which produced the rules and codes regarding successful hunting, planting, gathering, or building, and this society is most often also involved in legal questions of blame and the propagation of warfare.

The situation moves in turn into the beginnings of the sphere of religion; the unexplainable in an uncertain present must somehow be justified from the perspective of the rational hunter/gatherer, and also, revenge must be taken against loss. A reckoning is sought against whatever forces have caused the paradigm of success to fail, and this is explicit scapegoating. "In their effort to distance themselves from reconstructionism many defenders of Christian activism have adopted an opposite and equally heretical position on God's law—antinomianism. This is the belief that under the dispensation of the gospel, the believer is under no explicit obligation to Old Testament law."⁴³ Activist churches must have a unitary platform.

Religion is also a means of social cohesion rather than, or in addition to being, the collective explanatory or self-definitional means of a culture. There is anxiety in the culture about that which cannot be controlled, and an effort to explain or control these aspects through ritual and myth. The roots are in a perceived threat to the stability of the

⁴³Ibid.

society. The result is the admixture of religion, violence, and society. Humanity can be only so prepared, and there are also inherent limitations on the value of what can be known. This is not an easy thing to accept, especially when extensive planning and preparation have gone into the valued knowledge, which, as it often spans generations, is seen to be a system of valuable strength. This is shown in the detailed genealogies provided in the Bible, as well as the mixed message of war reportage and the need for peace and benevolence presented in the document. "Certainty attaches only to what we can learn from the text. Hypotheses are admissible only so far as they are essential for the interpretation of the text... if indeed there are 'influences,' how are these possible on the basis of faith?"⁴⁴

There are many sources internal to the Christian Church which can be used as a background for a church's political activism. For example, in Saint Augustine's writing, as well as in Hesiod and Euripides to a certain extent, there is the factor of conscience that is added to this interrelationship between religion, society, and activism through protest. Saint Augustine appears in much of his text to be focused on guilt, which could be construed as an inwardly-directed sort of violence or scourging that was replicated physically by the Jesuits and other Christian sects. Augustine states how he felt very guilty for turning his back on God, and that this guilt did not diminish once he accepted God. And his acceptance of God was also presented as a sort of immersion into the kingdom of heaven that was basically exclusive in nature and unifying in the sense that it created clear divisions for the author between what was sacred (the texts of Paul, his feelings of oneness with God) and what was profane (apparently most of his youthful

⁴⁴Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

activities). But at the same time, Augustine challenges this division by stating that he has found a unity or oneness with God that makes all past distinctions null and embraces a sort of fatalistic mysticism regarding what can be seen and not seen at certain points in an individual's life experience. Still simultaneously, Augustine felt that he had to reject the neo-Platonists, because his new relationship with Christianity was too exclusive to leave room for this philosophy.

In his text, Kammer seeks to align the concept of social justice with a primary mission of the church to change the social order and make it more humane, compassionate, and benevolent in terms of meting out justice. In terms of both the individual and the group level, social policy leaders are advised to take political means and economic means as well with an eye on the goal of reestablishing the church as central formulator and transformer of social policy along the lines of justice. "Justice, or the lack of it, manifests itself in the ways in which societies have patterned themselves in institutions, power arrangements, systems of finance and marketing, relationships between classes, ownership... and the distribution of costs and benefits among groups of persons."⁴⁵ The status quo of fragmented justice is put forth as being something that must be dynamically and effectively changed by the proposition of a justice that takes solidarity as its first order of business.

The author makes the point that current American society has been lulled into a sense of complacency and accepts the role of the downtrodden as a sort of extension of the status quo, and this goes back to a discussion of the Cycle of Baal: the first step is ownership, and the next is forgetting about the poor. Although the author states that

⁴⁵Kammer, *Doing Faith Justice*.

twenty years ago Americans were much less likely to be complacent about widespread hunger and need, the writer does not think it is as much of a temporal acceptance that has grown as time progresses, but rather think of it as a sort of continuum that the church has just begun to recognize and take action against very publicly, leading some to take a reactionary stance on an idealized past and make their points in this manner. "The emphasis on biblical law as a means to advance a visible expression of the kingdom of God in the world is to the discredit of theonomy. On the other hand, theonomy's strength is that it offers a systematic theology in support of Christian activism."⁴⁶

Kammer calls for a deeper understanding of the world from humanity: it is not enough the author states, to go through life looking at the surface of things and being content. A deepening of perspective is truly needed so that the problems of hunger and need start to come to the forefront instead of being forced into the background. The author makes the example of someone walking down a city street and being so preoccupied with the architecture that they do not notice the homeless people sleeping in alleys and at the bases of skyscrapers. In some cases, homeless people have become so desperate and so used to this unseeing gaze that they have resorted to assaulting people before they ask for money just to get their attention. This is annoying on the surface, but beneath the surface, it speaks of a very real problem that people are having by totally forgetting about one another and walking by with that unseeing gaze.

It is definitely a good point that Kammer makes regarding the necessity of seeing the world in a way that is conducive towards compassion instead of just simple observation. And out of this compassion comes a sense of solidarity that was being

⁴⁶J. Barber, *Christian Activism*, activism.<http://www.christianity.com/1133792/> (accessed November, 4 2010).

replaced by the simple self-interest of superficial cognizance, if one looks hard enough for it and finds it. For, as the Second Vatican Council has stated, “The joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and the anxiety of the followers of Christ.”⁴⁷

Kammer brings this concern into a domestic judicial focus in terms of structure, and also explores the role of nations in the international community from the position, that of the two major ideological systems that divided the globe during most of the twentieth century, neither seemed to hold social justice in much esteem, in terms of church activism.

The use of theology for justifying the church’s political activism can ultimately be traced back to the Apostle Paul. Paul the Apostle spread the word of Christianity, setting a whole new precedent for participating in Jesus. “Paul does not demonstrate his own faithfulness, but abruptly rejects any control... Paul cannot submit himself to any examination by a human authority, not even by himself. For this very reason his relation to the community is one of freedom.”⁴⁸ It is also arguable that the prevailing conception of Jesus through strategic management principles is not unheard of, because Jesus was a strategic planner as well who planned to re-establish the kingdom. “There is nothing inherently unChristian about traditional strategic planning! Like many other tools and processes, it is morally neutral—it all depends on how you use it. But typically, strategic planning for the church is done by a Strategic Planning committee; a group usually

⁴⁷Kammer, *Doing Faith Justice*.

⁴⁸Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

dominated by businessmen and does not adequately involve large numbers of church members.”⁴⁹ There are many variables involved. A cohesive organization is a successful one in terms of planning, and the organizational setting can only be cohesive when all levels of community believe that they can speak up and make a difference.

The more people who can get involved in the process, the more it will be an accurate reflection of the surrounding community’s true standards and goals. Without conversation and communication, this cannot happen. “Many authors that do use the Bible to support some form of Christian activism are therefore hesitant to offer their readers much more than a series of isolated proof texts on the subject for fear they may appear as heretics.”⁵⁰

Theoretical Foundations

The modern church’s search for common ground to balance faith and politics has always been a struggle. Much has changed in the social fabric of American society, as it relates to the church’s involvement in civil affairs. The complexities of America have caused the church to become involved in serving goods and monitoring the public policies that affect our society. Bureaucracy has grown, and the delivery of services has become extremely difficult.

Political officials have opened the door to permit church and state collaboration. This partnership cleared the way for a new brand called faith-based initiative. In today’s

⁴⁹Church development (2010) <http://www.churchleader.net/Transforming/ChurchDevelopment/tabid/81/Default.aspx> (accessed December 2, 2010).

⁵⁰J. Barber, Christian Activism, activism.<http://www.christianity.com/1133792/> (accessed November, 4 2010).

society, the government is downsizing the resources of the churches to assist in providing services to underprivileged. For example, in the winter of 2008, Westchester County government Department of Social Service reached out to Friendship Church of Mount Vernon, New York, to partner with them in providing overnight shelter to homeless persons as a warming center.

The church owned a large building and part of this building during the day was used for outreach functions. The county government had no building available to accommodate this essential service mandated by law. It became the church responsibility to run this program using county taxpayers' funds to offset the expenses. This collaboration fulfilled the church mission and fulfilled county government mandate without bureaucratic difficulty. In principle, the collaboration is tangible, but the church must have a separate entity known as a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to direct funds of government sponsored programs. It must be said that funding of these kinds of programs are attached to many restrictions, but the mission of the church is being fulfilled.

The issue presented in terms of theoretical underpinnings is problematic in relation to the given subject, which focuses at length on the issue of freedom of speech but is not as detailed about the question of separation of church and state. This issue is also problematic because under the current Obama administration, as well as under Bush and Clinton, public funds are going to faith-based organizations, which are increasingly being phased into the public sector in terms of providing services. Of course, this is not to say that all of these services are basic religious indoctrination programs, but it does tend to cloud the issue presented rather plainly in the question in terms of the strong language

of the constitution, which has equally strong language regarding many of the essential paradoxes of this country.

One theoretical underpinning of the church which has never been problematic is the foundational need to help those less fortunate. One of the questions facing Christians is how to align with a world in which common cause and liberation as represented through relationships with the poor and marginalized is a point of recognition. “How are we to be Christians in a world of destitution and injustice? There can be only one answer: we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation.”⁵¹

For many, the answer is finding common cause with the poor, related in terms of political statements that highlight the relationship of the church with the disadvantaged and downtrodden, from a perspective that takes the New Testament teachings of Jesus into account as a message of benevolence and solidarity in humanity, rather than separateness that is driven by external circumstances involving society’s codes and strictures.

A community forum held in the social hall of houses of worship provides a neutral setting for politicians and their constituents to work together on these social problems, such as hunger and homelessness. Many see the cycles of unawareness that are caused by social class stratification as a sort of cycle in which old rules are perpetuated. One way to change the cycle would be to focus on leadership programs to develop a different point of view as well as advocates for the realities of the situation. Education

⁵¹L. and C. Boff., *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

among people in the community promotes this kind of advocacy regarding problems caused by poverty and unequal societal roles. Projects like these can help communities keep together while fostering positive ideals like combating prejudice in society, and finding a cure for poverty, and providing services for the advancement and development of education. This would help parishioners reach and exceed their potential as positive, contributory members of their community before they get caught up in the vicious cycle of poverty.

A lot of people like to ask themselves, what they can do, as one person, to change any situation. The answer is that they can do everything that they can and accept the challenge of being an agent of change regarding what they see as political progress, for the continuing pursuit of social justice and equality. Friendship Church for years has been evident in raising issues that affect the quality of life within the community, and promoting social justice. Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church Mount Vernon, New York, has its challenges of becoming a politically involved congregation. The challenges are largely based on the perception that the church must avoid close association with civil government. The greatest challenge is finding the balance of involvement. A high profile church in a small community as Mount Vernon, New York, risks a great deal of criticism from politicians who seek to keep the church out of the public policy process.

It is clear that the church's principal mission is to win souls, but true transformation is holistic. The culture of Friendship Church had to change to accept that congregates had an obligation to engage themselves in the process. Voter registration

drive, candidates' forums, and community awareness meetings were conducted in the church fellowship hall.

The church of Jesus Christ's involvement in people's lives was the principal mission of Christ on earth. Some approach the problem of poverty's perpetuation rather indirectly, but effectively; by assaying investment trends and asking unanswered questions, following an estimation of where the money goes in terms of the populations who seem to need it most. Others describe the cycle of poverty more directly, not just in offhanded terms buried within a document that is basically about making money, but as a direct study of impoverished areas that relies extensively on previous studies and seeks to establish demographic patterns. Although these two perspectives are basically talking about the same thing in terms of distance, the approach used by different authors differs. Overall, however, minorities have traditionally experienced difficulties in achievement, in this respect resembling the poor whites of rural and southern America, who had been shut off from the economic system of slavery that had kept them going economically. Many blame this present situation on the conservative Supreme Court Justices who were nominated by republicans and who worked to roll back anti-prejudicial decisions.

In terms of its theoretical background, the church views liberation ideology as a way of meeting oppression. African-Americans have overcome many obstacles to getting education throughout the twentieth century, but there are many challenges that remain, especially in prevalently conservative political climates that seek to end forward progress and keep the status quo of today being a replacement of white suburbanization with materialism as a form of social control over African American and minority individuals. It is also an important job for the church to be in a worldwide progressive movement in

attenuating the church to the principles of unity of mission. “The door was opened for the development of a theology from the periphery dealing with the concerns of this periphery, concerns that presented and still present an immense challenge to the evangelizing mission of the church.”⁵² This is a movement with an interesting theoretical background.

Over the course of American history, people have had difficulty comprehending the phrase “separation of church and state.” One of the pioneers of this concept was Thomas Jefferson, the primary designer of the United States Constitution. By supporting the idea of creating a wall of separation between church and state, he contended that no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise shall be enacted. Accordingly, a *wall of separation* between church and state must exist. The wall of separation was never meant to forbid American society to practice its religion; rather this wall was to ensure a practice of religion free from governmental intervention.

Thomas Jefferson insisted that a wall of separation must exist between the church and state. American leaders resisted the intrusion of churches into government but never discouraged participation of churchgoers. However, because both church and state were strong and influential, the founders of our nation understood that the collaboration of these two entities would be the factor-key to the establishment of a new concept. This newly formed government would be prohibited from establishing any national religion. Thomas Jefferson strongly believed in the purpose of the wall of separation, and thus sustained its concept. Ironically, it was known toward the end of Jefferson’s life that he secretly consulted with religious leaders for guidance in the construction of the

⁵² Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*.

Constitution of the United States of America. At the same time, theory goes back even farther: “The historical roots of liberation theology are to be found in the prophetic tradition of evangelists and missionaries from the earliest colonial days in America—churchmen who questioned the type of presence adopted by the church and the way indigenous peoples... and the poor rural and urban masses were treated.”⁵³ This concern for the masses is something that can act as a unifying force.

The First Amendment right to freedom of speech has been shown in a public forum of open criticism which led to discriminatory conduct towards some and restraints on their personal freedoms as citizens. The church can oversee civil claims paid in First Amendment cases: freedom of speech, the press, and expression are very important and foundational. Often, however, in today’s environment, freedom of speech becomes a political and religious issue mixed. The separation of church and state is another important issue. Issues in this case reflect constitutional rights being called into question in terms of a basically unfavorable practice. The cessation of duties is often done in an effort to restrict freedom of speech in the pulpit.

Currently, in the United States, the operating system is one in which the organization can thank and praise Jesus if they wish. This principle is very time-honored and is part of the Constitution of the United States. If a person does not make foundationally libelous or slanderous claims in his or her existing reportage, they have the freedom to express and say what they want. The questioning of foundational issues of freedom of speech under the Constitution is a serious matter. Civil claims can restore some of what the citizen loses to undue censorship which affects them adversely, limiting

⁵³Ibid.

their freedoms. We are mindful that the First Amendment of the United States Constitution was written to guarantee the freedom of religion and to keep the government out of the people's churches. However, we refute that it also means the people out of the government. The government exists for the people and by the people; but a pulpit heralds the sound of alarm that gives the prophet the platform to speak as the mouthpiece of God. The creation of a politically active church is not an endorsement that the church should completely be involved in political activities. The church has a moral obligation to influence, and to draft its people to become active participators; the latter sitting at the table when public policies are being formed.

"The 14th and 15th Amendments were passed in 1868 and 1870, respectively. Initially meant to preserve personal freedoms of African Americans, they now stand, in large part, for the idea that the Constitution implies, but does not enumerate, certain fundamental rights for all citizens."⁵⁴

It becomes difficult, if not impossible to define the role the church plays as a civil political force. Although the church has its own religious political systems, it is naïve to think that the church does not weigh in on issues that directly affect its mission. Regardless of its initial concept, this invisible wall of separation has not stopped the United States Congress or United States Senate from opening each day of their session with prayer and a homily. A chaplain is designated to Capitol Hill to provide and maintain an environment of spirituality for our elected officials, no matter if they are Christian, Jew, Hindu, or Buddhist.

⁵⁴C. Wilder, *A Covenant with Color* (New York, NY: Columbia Publishing, 2004).

The difference between Jefferson's and Madison's interpretation of the wall of separation is the matter that should be once again brought up for discussion. Madison contended that the concept of the wall of separation was obscure. Church and state exist for the common good of providing services to their citizens. A society that encourages religious freedom must acknowledge a supreme being. Government must be guided by a moral authority that intersects the religious community. The church becomes the place that defines the symbol of absolutes. The forefather knew that the moral authority rested in the institution of the church. Their intention was to preserve separation by keeping the church out of the government, instead of the government out of the church.

In 1954, at the urging of President Eisenhower, the slogan "One nation under God" was adopted, and coined as a reminder that the American way of life for some was a combination of religious morals and constitutional laws. The Pledge of Allegiance is a sign that religion continues to play a central role in American public life. The outcry from its citizenry demanded a reference to God be included as an acknowledgement that American Society is guided and overseen by a supreme being. The Constitution of the United States only secured the right of religion to be established without the interference of the government.

However, no reference to God was ever mentioned in the document. The American judicial system reflects the notion of the separation of the two institutions to be a transparent wall. The principles of our judicial system is can be retraced to the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law provides the frame that affirms the authority of the state. The research of the advancement of American politics has mentioned that the root of the American political system acknowledges the existing of God. History bears that the wall

of separation only exists in concept, but the church always has been the voice of moral reason and conscience. This partnership between religion and government has been a strong union and can be seen throughout the evolution of United States history.

The partnership of the church and state can serve our citizens with faith-based programs as a conduit to the grass roots. The faith-based community has provided services to people in need, as a mean to close the gap of reduced services from the government. Bureaucracy has made it almost impossible to deliver services in a timely fashion to ordinary citizens. The idea of faith-based organizations emerged briefly during the Clinton Administration, but became more effective and official during the Bush Administration.

This latter administration thought that the government had not done enough to join the efforts of faith-based agencies experiencing the immediate results of aiding the unfortunate. The Bush Administration saw a great deal of reluctance by the federal government to embrace faith-based organizations. The philosophy of the separation between the church and the state caused the prior administration to adopt a policy that federal taxes should not be used to fund faith-based initiatives. The Bush Administration attempted to sustain faith-based initiatives, but the disparity between practical and symbolic actions was a tremendous challenge to overcome.

Furthermore, the evolution of faith-based organizations and government correlation has allowed religious groups to be granted access to the political table. This created an atmosphere of church-state collaboration. It is imperative for the local congregation to maximize their influence by creating a political-social action committee that will explore the many ways the church can collaborate with civil authorities. This

committee will aid in shaping a community of fairness as services are delivered to our communities. The formation of a political active congregation is offering the church as a conduit to connect services of civil government to the least among us. The collaboration of church and state should never be viewed as a reach for fishes and loaves while ignoring the morality of government practices.

James Cone defines the mission of the church as the liberator of the oppressed. Cone suggests throughout his writing of *Black Theology* that the teachings of Jesus Christ focus on liberation. Black's must address the unjust economic, political and social conditions that existing in the African American community. Christ confronted the system that oppressed the poor. During the Civil Rights movement, Reverend Martin Luther King encountered great oppositions from African American Church leaders. In Dr. Martin Luther King's Birmingham jail letter, in an answer to his critics, listed are the many reasons why we must not setback or delay. He quoted, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Dr. King answer to his critic refers to Saint Thomas Aquinas, who stated, "An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law."

Martin Luther King's teachings are widely respected and presented, and continue to impact the social and political dynamic of society today. King thinks that violence is as immoral a solution as acquiescence, and perhaps more so, since, as he states, "The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather

than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love.”⁵⁵

Seems to be presenting is a human way of looking at things as they seem, or as they are separated from humanity and classified as nature, which is dominant in the relationship and is the subject of humanity’s striving to append or apprehend it with words and distinctions flung at the essential change of the ever-changing moment. Many have focused on the fact that others in civil rights like Malcolm X portrays men as being violent and works from a tone of despair that is unrelenting.

Concentrating on the immorality of acquiescence, King states that, “To accept passively an unjust system is to cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed become as evil as the oppressor. Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.”⁵⁶ King sees the people who cooperate with the oppressor as having given up, and this creates the sense that it is not worth questioning one’s situation. He sees that too many people who have been cut down by oppression see themselves as being empowered by stating that they are used to being down or that being down does not matter to them. This attitude is immoral to King because he views it as a way of siding with rather than against the oppressor, who is immoral and is advocating the same point of view. Taken to its rational conclusion, this attitude of acquiescence will, according to King, only reinforce the arrogance and power of the oppressor, when s/he sees the results of their oppression in terms of acquiescence and finds their preconceptions reinforced.

Two strong opposing categories of division existed within the Christian church community. One opinion supported the intervention of the Christian church in

⁵⁵Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Ways of Meeting Oppression,” <http://www.gibbsmagazine.com/Ways%20to%20respond.htm> (accessed November 15, 2010).

⁵⁶Ibid.

governmental affairs; the other was strongly against. Their contention was on the percentage of interaction the church should have with the U.S. government at the expense of compromising its divine mandate to preach the gospel. This attitude caused Dr. Martin Luther King to begin a group called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as an extension of the Church. This group was created as a compromise of bridging the gap with those who felt uncomfortable in the church and with its being the leading group in direct protest against the United States government. The purpose of the SCLC was to recruit religious leaders and laity to address the social issues regarding the collaboration with other groups outside of the church. The SCLC never denied its affiliation with the church, or the spiritual dimension that guided its mission.

Thus, SCLC became an advocate for social change by recruiting Christian leaders to engage in civil disobedience without jeopardizing the church's tax-exemption status. The Christian church became a voice from the pulpit, informing the gospel message and empowering the pew to take civil duties as a way of ensuring justice and fairness for all. Engagement and collaboration became the order of the church's involvement.

The creation of a politically active congregation began the process of liberation. The church had a responsibility to pressure the government and the citizens to never forsake those who have been robbed of their basic human rights. The church must never compromise its message, but must only become contemptuous when injustice prevails. The Christian church must be the trigger to moral consciousness.

Although Christianity has not always lived up to its practices of promoting purity and morality, the church must stand alone in fighting injustice among all people. Thus, the church must not become silent on issues that affect basic human rights and dignity for all. The Christian church had learned from its pass that leaving people alone without challenging their moral consciousness is a great mistake. History has shown that the American Christian church emerged as a mighty influence in building the framework for the moral consciousness within the United States government. "Some historians have used the prevalence of racism as evidence that the United States was less class conscious than Europe. The class struggle as documented in England was not repeated in the United States because here racial identification overwhelmed class stratification."⁵⁷

The United States government has tried to determine what constitutes a church and has implemented a set of criteria to determine whether the church should be granted tax exemption. The Internal Revenue Service created a check of guidelines to determine if a church qualifies for tax exemption status. One of the basic criteria was non-involvement in political affairs. This could be viewed as a tactic to censure and prohibit what is said from the pulpit or monitor the political activities from the walls of the house of worship. United States Government has attempted to silence the voices of the church and enforcing limits by removing any government benefits from any church that engages in political activities. The government has defined the main role of the church as house for worship. Although the political arena has their concerns, this attitude seems to fade when political parties are in heated contest.

⁵⁷Wilder, *A Covenant with Color*.

The African American church has been known to be courted by many politicians because of the strong social agenda the black church has had historically. Sociologically understanding the black church experience and how the black church reshapes its mission will help to understand why the black church never saw a wall of separation. The black church became the hub of social interaction. The church connected with its community to fight against social injustice through non-violent methods.

Many of the working poor are also finding that due to a lack of job security and seniority, they are often being downsized as the economy lags at levels significantly lesser than those evinced in the nineties, when welfare reform made perhaps its greatest strides. At present, responsibility held by the program is increasingly being given to other organizations, many of them private-sector and religious enterprises. In many cases, this goes against the assumptions of program clients, who may have taken it as a given that they were being involved in a mostly federal program rather than one that was gradually being given over in terms of implementation to private and faith-based interests.

The United States Roman Catholic leadership has provided remarkable leadership in engaging its voice as the civil government that formulates public policy. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) were established in 1966, just after the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council set the ground work for Catholic Bishops around the world to establish an Episcopal conference to carry out the pastoral duties of the Episcopacy. "The republican or ideological school tends to see slavery as at most a side issue—a distraction

that nearly derailed the Constitution. This is true even though the same historians are sometimes willing to discuss the issue in other contexts.”⁵⁸

There is a basic paradox in the way that the society was going about addressing issues of slavery. The idea that slavery was entrenched or strengthened in America by the American Revolution can be strengthened or challenged by various arguments, including an argument about the relative power of slavery in British colonial society and economics. There are many paradoxes in American society, and one may also view the separation of church and state as one of the largest paradoxes, for the intent and purpose of the current investigation and proposal.

⁵⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Throughout Bishop Edwers' spiritual life, he has noticed the reoccurrence of events shaping his personal ministry. This ministry project is derived from Bishop Edwers' reflections and observations during his spiritual journey. The early stages of his Christian up-bringing afforded him the opportunity to see many different ways lives were transformed for Jesus Christ. Some Christians within the African-American Ecclesiastical communities have shied away from politics. However, Bishop Edwers believes that political involvement could become a vehicle to lift the plight of African Americans and demonstrate their expression of faith at work. This ministry project sought to examine how faith and politics can co-exist in Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church with the proper balance. The ultimate objective of this project was to development a manual that can be used within Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church in creating a politically active congregation. The manual was to be written in a form that other churches may find useful.

Bishop Edwers, influenced by his father and mentors, observed the role that the church played in civil affairs. Early in the 1960's the revolution of the civil rights movement was in full swing. This provided the framework for indoctrination to the concept of equal rights for all people. It was within this context that Bishop Edwers grew to understand his responsibility to be engaged in social activism. The attitude of social

consciousness was a long tradition held in his family because his parents migrated from the south, a region that had deprived many African-Americans of their rights to the basic necessities of life in the United States of America. Bishop Edwers father was a pastor who was engaged in protest rallies. He watched how his father and his colleagues met to bring awareness to the community regarding relevant issues. It is at this point Bishop Edwers developed an appetite for community social activism. This would ultimately lead him to preaching the gospel.

As it was during the days of his father, today, questions emerge within the church whether or not the church should engage in politics. This research was conducted with the prevailing presuppositions that the Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church should continue to engage in the struggle to affect social issues. Many African-American leaders and churches have shown themselves determined to develop or challenge social policies. The idea of separation of church and state is obscure at best and is therefore continuously open for interpretation. Although American society has struggled with the role of the church in politics; scripture in both the Old and New Testament never condemned their intersection.

The methodology for this ministry project explored the theological, biblical and historical understanding that others have wrestled with in the justification or non-justification of the church political involvement. The project attempted to show that the separation of church and state can be misleading at best. Leaders of many African-American Christian churches have never had a non- involvement attitude towards politics or civil affairs. Although the principle mission of the church has been the proclamation of the gospel with the purpose of winning souls for Christ, addressing the basic issues that

effect quality of life for African-Americans has always been in the playbook of the African American religious tradition. This ministry project showed that religious leaders have emerged as civic leaders in high positions within government in the Old and New Testament; a practice of religious leadership that continues in this post modern era.

History has shown that African-American religious leaders have had a strong conviction regarding the engagement of faith and politics. Samplings of African American religious figures that can be seen as examples of this movement are Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Rev. William H. Gray III, Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, and Rev. Floyd Flake. Each of these African American Pastors played a major role in defining the extent or balance of faith and politics within the African American Church.

History also bears witness to African-American ministers who had to deal with the negative effects of engaging in social issues from the pulpit when their congregation's were opposed to political involvement. For instance, Rev. Vernon Johns, pioneer of the Civil Right Movement and pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church Montgomery, Alabama found himself embroiled in conflict within his church and community because of his social and political activism. Rev. Johns was socially outspoken and preached sermons that made his congregation and others feel uncomfortable. Whites and blacks were scared of the thoughts of Johns. His social activism was base on his convictions born through his faith. During Rev. John's era, political and social activism had no place in the pulpit.

Henry W. Powell writes in his book, *The Life and Times of The Prophet Vernon Johns: Father of the Civil Rights Movement*, "Vernon Johns himself was a victim of politically correct code. After all, he was constantly violating the code. He was a man

who said what others were afraid to say. While inspiring the few, his words made most of his listeners uncomfortable, and this in turn would anger them.”

The question remains what is the proper balance of faith and politics? Can Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church, find the proper balance and inspire its leaders and members toward healthy participation in the political arena. This project seeks to create a program that will help an African-American congregation move toward political activity.

This project will examine the context and trace the historical progression of Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church’s involvement in civil and political affairs. Throughout Friendship’s history, the Friendship Church has been involved in the political life of the community. During the 1960’s, under the leadership of the late Reverend Otis Park, a crusade began to address the disparities that existed in the City of Mount Vernon. The disparities were seen in the Mount Vernon Public School System, the health care system, as well as in the wholesale practice of segregation in this area. The church community came together to involve itself in protest rallies and marches to address the systematic cycle of racism. At that time, social activism was the norm and the church became the hub of such activities. Eventually, the city elected its first African-American Mayor. Ronald Blackwood had the distinction of being the first African-American Mayor elected in Mount Vernon, as well as in New York State. This transition was accomplished through the jointed leadership of the Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church and others churches, groups and organizations mobilizing the leadership from within the community.

Friendship Church continued that legacy of social activism when the church partnered with the neighborhood associations to address social and political issues. Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church located on the south side of Mount Vernon, New York on the corner of Ninth Ave and Fifth Street met with the Ninth Avenue Neighborhood Association to address upsurge of drug activity in the city that involved drug overdoses and killings. This issue became a priority for Friendship Church. Friendship Church and Ninth Avenue Neighborhood Association organized a march down Third Street drawing attention to this problem.

Over time Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church became more and more involved in quality of life issues and the concerns of the people. Friendship Church engaged in disputes between Mount Vernon and Sound Shore Hospitals, the Mount Vernon Board of Education over multiculturalism, control of the City School Board, human rights concerns, and the Stop the Violence Campaign. The more Friendship Church engaged in local issues it became respected as a leader in the community. It is within this context Bishop Edwers seeks to develop a project that Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church will continue its involvement in social political activism.

Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church Mount Vernon, New York has developed apathy over the years in their involvement in politics. This lack of interest has grown out of the change in demographics and the empowerment of high level African Americans holding governmental office in the city. The feeling of *we have arrived* has caused many to raise the old question, "should the church be politically active?"

However, the social issues are more critical than the civil rights era. The economic disparities still exist between race and gender. The lack of adequate funding for

school systems in low performing minorities neighborhoods is still unresolved. The list of issues has grown from the civil rights era and continues growing; new recruits of church members must be identified and trained in becoming engaged in the political process.

A Summary of Ministry Model Design

The ultimate objective of this project design is to examine how faith and politics can co-exist respectively in Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, New York, by understanding that the wall of separation must be preserved between the state and church. The wall of separation came as a result of the first amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. The first amendment prohibits Congress from interfering with the exercise of religion and prevents Congress from enacting legislation respecting the establishment of religion. This was known as the Establishment Clause, introduced by Thomas Jefferson, the architect of the Constitution, and insisted that the government must not favor one religion over another, or provide aid for any religion.

James Madison saw that religion was a private issue that government should not establish, but he did preclude that religion was a part of the American culture. A balance must be the approach of Church involvement in Government. The Constitution never restricted or limited the role of Church in government, but prohibits the role of government in the church. The objective of this project is to show that the African-American Church has always challenged the practices of the government when injustice existed.

The project design outlined the process of how information from the presuppositions are gathered and interpreted. The data collected will assist in the creation

of a manual assisting others who wish to increase the participation of their local congregations in addressing political issues.

The following details the course by which this project attempts to develop a politically active congregation. A qualitative action research methodology will be employed utilizing group discussions and by developing and presenting four sermons consecutively over a four-week period of time. These sermons will be presented to a focus group comprised of members of the Friendship congregation that represent a diverse cross section of members, different ages, social economic levels, and genders. These sermons will be intentionally designed to highlight the nuances and importance of the relationship between church and politics. These sermons will be presented in worship and the members that participate in the focus groups will be assembled after each service to immediately provide reflection on the sermons in hope that this will help them better remember the sermons.

The focus group will consist of several members of Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church who will write a two page essay on their presupposition of what involvement the church should have in politics. Bishop Edwers will then deliver the sermons in worship. The participants will debrief and they will write another two page essay that asks them to share what they learned from the sermons as it relates to the role of church in politics.

The analysis of the pre and post essays will allow this researcher to investigate whether educational growth has taken place or attitudes have remained the same. The pre and post essays will be shared with professional associates and discussed in order to draw the conclusion of the data collected. The researcher will interpret the data and formulate

the proper conclusion. The information will be placed in an instructional manual to assist others on how to create a politically active congregation.

The composition of this focus group consists of eight females and three males. The age range is from 21 through 67 years of life. Four members possess graduate degrees, two members possess undergraduate degrees, one member is a junior in college, one member has some college credits and career training, one member possesses a GED, and two members possess high school diplomas. The members consist of eleven working individuals and one retiree. Range of active membership for the focus group is the recently joined member of 16 months and the longest tenured member of 48 years. This group provides a wealth of history and understanding of Friendship Church culture.

The social economic levels of this group will help interpret why or why not the Friendship Church should be or become more politically active. As the church evolves with different people leaving and coming, this focus group will help to understand how politics and faith can find balance within Friendship Unified Baptist Church in Mount Vernon. The presuppositions that the members of the focus group have will be revisited throughout our discussions to see the impact that the sermons might have in the changing or affirming of their positions.

Project Timeline

The project will commence on Tuesday February 1, 2011 at 6:30 P.M. with the assembling of the focus group. Letters have been sent to the participants regarding the submission of their first essay. The actual project will take two months for the gathering of the information acquired from the essays, feedback, and questionnaires.

Sunday, January 30, 2011

- The completion of focus group essays.
- A letter will be written in the bulletin regarding my doctoral project process and encouraging the participation of the congregation in the process.
- Introduction of February Black History Month Sermon series entitled *The Call to Civic Responsibility*, Preaching that Affect change.

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

- First focus group meeting

Sunday, February 6, 2011

- The beginning of *Four Series Sermons* titled:
 - i. The Church and State: The Myth
 - ii. Limited Inclusion but Inclusion, the Church, the Voice of Moral Reasoning
 - iii. The Politics of Jesus as Defined by the Bible
 - iv. Can Christians be Christian and Politicians at the Same Time

Questionnaires will be distributed to the congregation for feedback and collected at the end of each sermon delivered. The focus group will meet immediately after the service to debrief and help process the data. Meetings will be taped and transcribed in written form.

Sunday, March 6, 2011

- Focus group meets to reflect on the principals learned during the exchange and teaching moments from the sermons delivered.

Analysis of the Data

The focus group will discuss the data collected and draw conclusions. The focus groups will revisit our presupposition and examine any trends that surface to support or discourage church involvement in politics.

Friday March 11, 2011

- Analysis is completed.

Supportive Research Process

During this process, the researcher will examine the materials that support the presupposition that the church can engage in politics and still maintain the separation of Church and State. The researcher will compare his conclusion with other authorities in the field.

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

- Analysis is completed

Writing of the First Draft of the Document

The writing of the first draft will compile all data with the creation of a manual, *How to Create a Politically Active Congregation*.

Wednesday, April 20, 2011

- Completion of the manual.

Completion of the Final Project

The necessary revisions will be completed with the input of professional associates, peer associates, and authorities in the field of politics and faith.

Friday, July 15, 2011

- Completion of input

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Process of Compiling the Data

During the past several months we began the process of gathering data to create a project manual designed to create a politically active congregation. This process began with the presupposition that members of a local congregation should never divorce themselves from being politically active. The researcher used the qualitative action research methodology to investigate whether Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church members understood the Establishment Clause which built a wall of separation, between the church and state. The researcher attempted first to gather a sample opinion of a selected few within the congregation to poll their views and understanding of the church role, if any, in politics. Those that were chosen constituted a focus group who understood the pulse of the congregation.

The focus group consisted of several members of Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church. The age ranges of the participants were from 21 through 67 years. Four members possessed graduate degrees, two members possessed undergraduate degrees, two currently attending college, one member has some college credits with career training, one member possessed a GED, and two members possessed high school diplomas with some college and technical training. This focus group has a wide range of career experience. It was the researcher's attempt to identify members of the focus group

that could retrace the church's involvement in political activism. The range of active membership for the focus group was as early as 16 months of membership to the longest tenure of 48 years of membership. This group provided a wealth of history and understanding of Friendship Church culture.

The social economic levels of this group was important to help understand the need base of this congregation. The diversity of the focus group provided a unique perspective on why or why not Friendship Church should be, or become more politically active. Each member of the focus group had their own presupposition of Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church's involvement in politics. It was interesting to hear and see the different views presented by each member of the focus group prior to the project emerging. We will elaborate at length on the pre and post test finding as we continue the evolution of this journey.

This focus group was asked to commit themselves to the process of gathering critical data to draw conclusions. Their first assignment was to write a two page essay sharing their thoughts on the question of church and politics. The initial question was asked to determine where their understanding was, and to determine at the completion of this project if their opinions had changed or remained the same. This information provided the researcher the framework to begin building his project. Their understanding would in some ways provide him a clue of where the mindset of Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church resided. He read the essays carefully looking for common trends among the focus group.

The researcher made his own assessment of his findings as he processed the pre-essays data. The essays had a tone of resistance of any notion that the church should

engage in any political discussion, forum or activities; however, it was obvious that they had no clue that the Bible contained many references of biblical personalities who were used by God in politics. One of the focus group members stated:

There's a fine line to draw when it comes to Church and Politics. However, I believe the two must be kept separate and not incorporated in Sunday morning services. If it's Social Politics concerning the community, then I'm all for it because it is our community and people needs to be aware of their surroundings and what we as people can do to make it better. Congregations are made aware of what's going on in the world and their community through the newspapers and governmental hearings that's open to the public so that they are able to have a more in depth understanding of the issues at hand. Yes, the church should be involved in some matters/issues that will affect the church as a whole such as zoning, outreach and should be communicated through an appointed group of members from the congregation. However, if the politics has absolutely nothing to do with the community, then it needs to stay out of the Church, especially on the day that we are supposed to praise and worship.

She further stated the only manual needed for church is the Holy Bible. This seemed to initially be the general sentiments of the members of the focus group. However, there emerged a minority voice that said:

I appreciate the fact that the pastor of Friendship Worship Center is so politically inclined that he can inform me of political issues that I am uninformed of. Unfortunately, many African Americans are not aware of their rights and the impact the government has on their rights. I refuse to be ignorant to the political world because I want my voice to be heard throughout my community. I feel as though the Bishop C. N. Edwers is my voice in the political arena, he relates the message of the people to political figures that are not accessible to the normal working class citizen.

The researcher's assessment of the pre-essays concluded that two opinions had emerged. First, it was clear that the institution of the church was sacred, and any intrusion into that sacred space especially during Sunday worship should never be accepted. For the most part, politics had no biblical reference and should not receive much

consideration during divine worship. Once again, it was interesting to read a comment of the longest tenured member of Friendship Church. She wrote,

There were times, many years ago at Friendship U. F. W. Baptist Church when it seems as if the only subject of interest coming from the pulpit was political. Even prayers were political in nature by certain deacons. Even though the sermon may have been informative, at times, personally I wanted to hear something more spiritually up-lifting. Sometimes there was no balance.

The researcher seemed to feel in processing the data that the writers opinion were that politics was a non spiritual intrusion into the sacred. Preaching, singing and praying could occur for hours, but politics must be reduced to a few minutes, or they preferred no mention of politics at all from the pulpit. As indicated previously the focus group represented a sampling of Friendship Church membership, and it is likely that their sentiment is the initial take of the congregation.

Secondly, the researcher discovered that there was great support for the pastor being personally informed and involved in politics but he should keep politics out the pulpit or to a minimum. Another member of the focus group further stated,

As far as Friendship Worship Center is concerned, I believe that politics should maintain a role in our worship but only to a certain extent. We shouldn't show preference for any individual politician or national party. Due to the twenty-four hour news cycle world that we live in today, it is understandable why most people prefer not to divulge into politics at church. Now if a balance can be found between how politics is introduced into the church, then I am all for the two being united. For example, incorporate it into the sermon rather than a separate discussion.

The pre-essays demonstrated that work had to be done to show that the call to civic responsibility had to do with the churchgoer's involvement and not the church institution. The researcher also discovered that the pastor never introduced any sermons that supported the idea that politics were interwoven throughout the Bible. The researcher

became curious about how the reshaping or cementing of positions would form in creating a politically active church.

Once the researcher had process the pre-essays, it was time to decide on the timeline to execute the project. The researcher decided that the Black History Month Observance at the Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church would be a great time to incorporate his project. Early in January 2011 he met with the members of the Black History month committee to discuss how his project could enhance the church's Annual Black History month observance. The committee had chosen the theme, *The Family: It takes a Village to Raise a Child*. During this meeting the researcher requested that they would consider expanding their focus with the *Call to Civic Responsibility*. The committee agreed, and he indicated to them that during the four Sundays in February he would prepare sermons that would address the complex issues of the separation of church and state, the involvement of church members in civic affairs as a Christian, and our social response to the disparities existing among the least among us; *A Call to Social Justice*.

The researcher began to process the information he discovered from research of those pioneers who attempted to wrestle with the issues of the wall of separation of church and state, and the church's availability to collaborate within both institutions. He examined several passages of scriptures, and did the necessary word study to collaborate what he interpreted. Armed with this information, he set out to communicate through preaching, his findings that supported his presupposition. The challenges of these sermons were to establish a biblical perspective of Bible personalities who engaged in both institutions successfully. The researcher knew that this material presented would

bring some level of disagreement among the regular attendees, but the benefit would be that it would cause a transformation among some of the worshippers.

Sunday, January 30, 2011 the project was unveiled to the worshippers at Friendship Church in a Newsletter. Excerpts of the letter read:

February is Black History observance. For many years FWC have tried to lift the awareness of the contributions that many African Americans have made in the advancement of our cause. Once again Sister Patricia Holt and her committee have planned a beautiful program for us this year. This year as part of our Black history observance I will begin my doctoral studies project. The project title is *Moving Toward Creating A Politically Active Congregation*. I am asking you to help me in this process. During the Sundays of February I will begin a Sermon series entitled, *The Call to Civic Responsibility: Preaching that Affects Change*. I will be preaching Sermons entitled: *The Separation of Church and State, The Myth From the Prison to the Palace, God's Strategic Positioning, The Politics of Jesus as Defined by the Bible and Can Christians be Politicians*.

He said to them that a questionnaire would be distributed each Sunday and he asked every person to fill them out and return them to the ushers at the end of the service. He stressed that their opinions were solicited, and helpful in this process. The feedback indicated that the announcement was well received. Immediately after morning worship the essays of the focus group were collected.

Sunday, February 6, 2011 the project started That morning Bishop C. Nathan Edwers proceeded to deliver the first sermon of the series. His impression was that the tone of the service immediately shifted as it was stated in the focus group once we debriefed. Many of the worshippers thought that his presentation was more of a lecture than a sermon. The call and response that is usually a part of the Sunday morning message was gone; the congregation had shifted into a listening mode unusual for Friendship Church. The pastor presented his prepared text, and read the entire sermon

from a manuscript, a method he had long abandoned. While during the sermon he noticed that the questionnaires had been distributed among the worshippers, and many were taking notes, and perhaps, filling out the questionnaires while he preached. At the end of the service the ushers collected a few questionnaires, but a member of the focus group, encouraged several others to fill out their questionnaires.

The first meeting of the focus group was held in the Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church Library. We met to outline the process, their responsibility in assisting in the gathering of the data, and the interpretation of the collected data from the pews after each sermon. During this time, the focus group discussed the first sermon delivered. The pastor inquired about the committee's reactions and comments. The group asked was the sermon recorded, and said that the first sermon was educational. The focus group began to see an integration of the Bible, theology and history emerging as the foundation for this project. They were surprised to know that references of God were not mentioned in the constitution. They presumed that the United States Constitution was a document that was largely influenced by Christians during its construction. The focus group felt that because God's name was included on United States currency with the inscription that reads, "In God we Trust", and because the United States Congress opens each session with prayer, and the oath that is administered to elected officials ends with the reference, "So help me God", they never thought that the name of God would be omitted from the United States Constitution.

The discussion of the sermon revealed several unknown facts to most of the members in the focus group. The candid discussion focused on the historical and biblical perspective of the two institutions, the church and state. This was the ground work of

building the framework to the project's ultimate objective. But during the meeting after the focus group heard the first sermon and began debriefing, the researcher began to see signs that opinions were forming differently. Each time the focus group met, the researcher noticed that the tones were shifting to favor that the pulpit and pew should be encouraged to have some kind of engagement in politics.

The surveys of the sermon's poll provided some interesting insight. Following are the results of those findings.

The Church and State: The Myth of Separation

Of the 28 respondents, over 95% of the responders believe that God ordains government and that we must submit to civic government. The majority of respondents do not believe the pulpit should divorce itself from speaking out against injustice. Some 53% felt the Establishment Clause was not necessary while 50% felt God's name being left out of the Constitution could be read as an anti-God gesture. The majority answered that Christians should not submit to mandates that are directly against the teaching of Christ while over 90% felt our civic duty is to pray for our government.

The short answers were quit insightful. The researcher concluded from the data collected the following summary: Overall, 100% of the 28 individuals who completed a survey believe the church should have a role in government. The role should be to pray, participate, support, respect and obey. Over 60% of responders believe that freedom of religion is free within the United States and that all religions should be recognized. Some 46% believed that separation of church and state is a false illusion while 10% believe it is a real separation. Lastly, 50% of those who responded agreed that God's name should have been omitted from the constitution while the remaining 50% disagreed.

From the Prison to the Palace: God's Strategic Plan

Of the 20 respondents, 100% believed God has a plan for God's people and God will place you in a strategic position to fulfill God's plan for your life. Another 90% believed that the church is managed by people who govern themselves by a value system influenced by some kind of religious doctrine, polity and dogma. The majority of respondents felt that both church and government has overstepped their bounds by co-existing without dispelling the notion that the separation of church and state is a myth. All or 100% of the responders are aware of biblical personalities who demonstrate both religious and civic collaborations.

The short answers were summarized in the following statement: The mandate that Christians must adhere to is The Bible, and Christians should honor their call to civic responsibility by living for Jesus, improving the quality of life for all, and adhering to the word of God. The majority responded that Joseph had a dual role in both the church and government. Lastly, God strategically placed both Joseph and President Obama to accomplish God's plan.

The Politics of Jesus as Defined by the Bible

There were 22 responders to this sermon. Of those responding, 100% believe that Jesus was a politician and over 90% agree that the mission of Christ was about liberation. Another 86% felt that salvation changes a person's social perception and 95% felt that Christians should embrace the social agenda of Jesus. Over 90% of those who responded believe that the church is political and Jesus was political while winning souls for the kingdom of God. The majority agreed that FWC should develop a social political action

group to keep membership aware of current social issues in our community.

The general belief was Christians can live right and be involved in politics while working effectively with both religious and civic matters. Of those surveyed, 100% felt the church should develop a social agenda to improve the quality of life for all people. Many seemed interested in what FWC can do in its community to be politically involved. Some of the responses suggested that FWC provide election information, help the poor understand implications of actions and decisions of the political process; help families become more unified, present political information from the pulpit to make members aware of politics and to offer more youth activities.

Lastly, all respondents felt this message was informative and they now have a better understanding of politics in the church and that there is no real separation of the church and government since Jesus was a politician.

Can Christians be Christians and Politicians?

There were only 12 responders to this sermon. Of those responding, 100% felt that George Washington was deliberate in not professing his faith. Over 65% of responders would like to see the Moral Majority support a system like Jerry Falwell started. Over 90% felt that since Nicodemus was a politician that was also born again, then, politicians should be willing to profess their faith. All or 100% of those responding feel Christians can be Christians and politicians while 83% answered that their involvement in civic affairs does not hinder their faith in Christ. Lastly, 91% feel FWC should become more politically active.

The short answers were summarized in the following statements: Of those responding, 66% believe separation of church and state is an illusion; this represents a

20% increase compared to the initial 46% response from week one. Another 83% felt it is important for politicians to be Christians. The list below provides the brief responses to what the responders have learned during this series:

- 1) God's name should not have been removed from the constitution
- 2) Christians and politicians can work side by side
- 3) There is no real separation of Church and State
- 4) Jesus was a politician and still won souls
- 5) A good public servant must be born again
- 6) The government shouldn't get involved in church affairs and church members should get involved with governmental affairs

The final session of the focus group discussed the data collected and identified some conclusions that were drawn. In the final recorded session, the focus group members were pleased with the information presented by the four sermons. They indicated that they learned a great deal about the churchgoer's responsibility in becoming civically involved.

The focus group talked at length about the reactions of the congregation through this process. They felt that many were listening but a few expressed their discomfort about the forum used to introduce what was being said. They felt that the sermons' content provided them a new insight on how religion and politics co-existed. The researcher discovered that the focus group members initially never associated politics with the Bible or heard a political perspective of it from the Bible. Their initial view of church and state was that the Bible provides no direct correlation. This seemed to be the great sentiment of the congregation.

However, the post-sermon series essays show the changing of their opinion,

understanding and awareness. Several members of the focus group provided their summation of the process. One respondent said;

The members of the church can and should become involved in government. I also learned about the contradiction in the Constitution in which our forefathers excluded any references to God yet they stated several times to take oaths and the oaths referenced God. I must say that I was shocked to learn that the Constitution didn't reference God. The best part of the sermon was Bishop Edwers references to scriptures in the Bible about politics. Having read many of the scriptures he referenced, I had never seen the relationship to politics. I also learned that one of the easiest ways to get involved in politics is to pray for those in authority. This was the first time I had ever heard being or becoming politically involved from a biblical point of view; it was very refreshing and informative.

The researcher took notice of the comments of another respondent. She said;

This series told me the political position of many in the Bible. Prior to this experience I never read the bible as the political manual that governs the lives of Christians. There were many scriptures taught over the last four weeks that indicated the submission to government. These submissions were illustrated in both the Old and the New Testaments. Even knowing these facts, I know many still struggle with understanding the co-existence of both religion and politics. I would challenge those who read the Bible to read it with an open mind and read past the words and understand the reasons why those in the bible respected the law of God which is to obey government.

A third respondent stated;

As I reflect back on my presupposition essay written one month ago, I have cause to change my views on Religion & Politics. Bishop Edwers has shown us in the past four weeks how religion and politics co-exists today as it did in biblical days. His sermons and scrutiny have forced me to rethink my position and look at this controversial topic in a new and different way. I've learned that we must approach the subject of separation of church and state or wall of separation with an open mind.

She further stated,

We went on to take a look at the U. S. Constitution and found that it guaranteed the freedom of religion under the first amendment.

We found that the first amendment was originally intended to keep the government out of people's churches, not to keep the church people out of government and that the Constitution was written with no direct reference of God. Upon further examination we found that there were three places within the Constitution that stated "so help me God." This was a monumental moment for me. None of this was brought to light as a student in elementary and high school. Yes, we were taught the Bill of Rights and were mostly infused with the passage of inalienable rights, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

During this process the researcher has concluded that the Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church has begun the process of transformation. The researcher's conclusions are as follows:

- The researcher feels that attitudes have begun to change with a tone of tolerance among many at the mention of politics in the pulpit when balance is employed.
- The researcher concluded that the resistance to becoming a politically active congregation is largely because of the ignorance of the pew. When things are taught from a biblical perspective the pew is left to draw their own conclusion. When the pastor fails to mention about the correlation of politics and the Bible, the local church will never push towards activism.
- The researcher has determined that there is a desire of Friendship Church members to become more politically active in the creation of a social action ministry to lift issues that have a direct affect on the quality of life within our communities.

Over the course of this journey the researcher has grown through the essays, group discussions, questionnaires feedbacks and interviews. The journey was insightful, armed with the information the researcher needed to create a Manual for Creating a Politically Active Congregation.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Six is the culminating chapter of this Doctor of Ministry project. In the final chapter of this thesis the researcher has done an analysis of the entire process. The analysis will attempt to provide the framework for the structure of a manual. The researcher will attempt to create a manual that other congregations will find useful in the creating of a Politically Active Congregation. Although the researcher is committed to the creation of this manual, the ultimate objective of this project is to satisfy the Doctor of Ministry requirements. Therefore, the researcher will set forth to develop an outline of this manual and at some later date, will provide the expanded details.

The researcher has concluded that creating a politically active congregation requires a great deal of congregational training. During this Doctor of Ministry process, the researcher discovered that a large number of churchgoers seem to think that being political does in some way preclude one from being spiritual or maintaining a strict adherence to their religious practices. Some Christians who engaged in politics think that the church should shy away from any political involvement. The researcher found that both Christians and politicians had an unwillingness to compromise their beliefs initially. For both groups, politics in American society had an element and image of corruption and exploitation. The challenges of this project were to show that through biblical and

historical research, both church and government have much in common. Both institutions must collaborate to discern the best solutions for society. As the project emerged and continued in its evolution, the researcher found that participants began to soften their opinions of the project.

The researcher found that the systemic entrenchment of the separation of church and state required a clearer understanding of how both institutions intersect to accomplish the same objectives. The researcher found that the role of the church and state needed a clearer understanding; not from the interpretation of the American forefathers for it was them that developed the Establishment Clause. This clause created confusion over the restriction that the United States Government has placed or established by preference on any one religion as a state decree in the forming of this republic.

Although they may have had wonderful intentions in excluding United States Government intrusion into the church, the practical implications has placed the church and state at odds with each other over the centuries. The researcher discovered through this process that moving towards creating a politically active congregation is the desired goal; however, the ongoing discussions of the intersection of both institutions perhaps will never be definitive.

Levels of suspicion arise in some individuals minds when a Christian engages in politics. This attitude became clear as the researcher began this project. The researcher found that resistance to political activity on the part of the church, especially during worship; came largely because worshippers felt that this was intruding into their sacred space and time.

Participants in the focus group were members that reluctantly agreed to participate in this project. They came with their own presuppositions, and most of them were unable to explain why they felt the way they did. They wanted to understand what it meant to create a politically active congregation? Should a congregation be engaged in politics? What are the implications of church engagement as it relates to the separation of church and state? To answer these questions fully, the researcher found that the first task was to create an environment of learning.

The researcher found that the ultimate barrier of creating a politically active congregation is ignorance. The term ignorance is not used in a negative connotation, but the smartest and the brightest in our pews ignore the responsibility of the church to shape the discussions of public policy. The researcher found that most churchgoers understanding of the separation of church and state to mean that social issues should be addressed by politicians and spiritual issues should be addressed by ministers or preachers. The researcher discovered that the basic understanding of those who initially participated in the project were that there should never be a correlation between the two; and limited collaboration if possible. This became obvious as the researcher read the post essays.

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this work and those areas of most significance. The researcher will address the growing edges and aspects of this work that the researcher would do differently. He will identify how this project can be replicated in other congregations and provide recommendations for continued and further praxis.

The evolution of Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church was born out of the southern tradition of church worship and polity. Friendship Church over the course of its existence found itself limitedly engaged in social issues, drafted into this forum merely because of social ills and disparities that affected the communities it served. Yet the primary focus was to win souls for Christ. The social gospel message of Christ became irrelevant to this congregation; this was not an anti attitude towards Christ social agenda, but the lack of exposure. The culture of the church did not lend itself to social activism. The immigration of southerners to the north in the early forties was in full swing; Blacks were looking for better conditions and employment in the north. Friendship Church founders were southerners and they created a culture making the church the hub of social and spiritual activities of its members. Hell and damnation, and heaven, the ultimate resting place for believers were the messages preached Sunday after Sunday from its pulpit.

No mention of politics or social issues that would improve the quality of life beyond the church was mention on a regular basis. It was as those Friendship Church had divorce itself from this process. The researcher mentions this because the culture of the institution dictated its practices. This culture began to change in the mid sixties as the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. Issues of civil rights forced Black churches to engage in conversations regarding the role the church must play in condemning an oppressive system. The history of Friendship Church captures a congregation that was inward focused without any involvement in the social gospel. However, the researcher interviewed key long standing members and discovered that Friendship Church had little if any resistance to the collaboration of state and church, but their understanding was that

politics had no place in the church. It was a direct contradiction of Friendship Church's own church policies. Friendship Church has no written or oral history of direct engagement. However, during the sixties, members of Friendship Church joined in the protest rallies against social injustice.

The systemic culture rooted in Friendship Church was a challenge to begin the indoctrination of a social gospel agenda. The challenge of this project was overcoming the systemic resistance of creating a politically active congregation when the church did not see social issues as a priority. The researcher attempted to introduce a new approach to ministry for Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church. The project was introduced to Friendship Church as a partial fulfillment of the doctoral degree requirement. The congregation was excited about assisting the researcher in his journey to complete his professional degree. Perhaps the project could be seen as a setup in leading Friendship Church into an awareness of their responsibility to the social gospel agenda of Christ Jesus.

The project was announced to the congregation through a letter in connection with Friendship Church month long observance of Black History. This was a strategic move on the part of the researcher. The Black History observance at Friendship Church had always combined both sacred and secular. The researcher felt that given the culture of Friendship Church less resistance for this project would occur during the Black History month observance. The strategy paid off and the project was accepted by the attendees during four Sunday morning worship experiences. The researcher felt that this was one of the strong points of the project. The sermons delivered were geared toward a biblical

interpretation of the church's engagement in politics and the social agenda of Jesus Christ.

The sermons were merely part of a larger puzzle. The researcher spent hours examining the biblical and historical involvement of biblical personalities who found themselves engaged into the political arena. The researcher's hypothesis was that God strategically designed their presences. The sermons attempted to provide an interpretation of God's active role in governance of the civic affairs of the people. The ushers distributed questionnaires about the sermon as worshippers enter. This was something new and most people did not understand why the pastor's sermon was being analyzed. Some participated in the process while others had concerns that in some way this anonymous questionnaire would be used as a critique of the pastor performance. This perhaps could be seen as a weakness in the process but the data collected was valuable. Those who completed the questionnaires were a small percentage of members present but the responses were useful in the discussion that followed with the focus group.

Every Sunday while the project commenced after morning worship the focus group members assembled in the library of Friendship Church to debrief on what had occurred. The discussions started with a summation of the responders' answers. They looked to see any trends among the questionnaires. They provided their comments as the focus group and researcher tried to interpret what the responders were saying in the questionnaires. This process was helpful because the researcher asked the what, why and how questions to the group. The interpretation of the data was a joint effort.

The focus group members were selected among the membership that represented various backgrounds of the congregation. The researcher conducted a pre-test that required the participants to write a two part essay of their position. This was the start of data collection for the project. The members of the focus group addressed their own presuppositions providing valuable insight as the project evolved. Their statements were candid and concise, perhaps with little movement away from their position.

The question they were asked to answer was, "Should the church become politically active?" The researcher examined their essays to see whether there were any common trends among the team members. This process was insightful and provided the researcher with enough information to get a feel of the congregation's actual mindset. This information was valuable to this project and the researcher integrated their comments into the body of this thesis. The pre-test became the launch pad for the construction of a manual for moving towards creating a politically active congregation.

At the first meeting of the focus group, the researcher asked the participants to discuss their opinions. The researcher encouraged them to be open and frank about the position they took. The researcher discovered that most positions were formed out of misinformation, little to no information or mere opinions of others who had weighed in on the discussion prior to this project. The researcher respected their positions and concluded that this process became a great asset to the progression of this project. The researcher presented his presupposition to the group and asked that they would examine each week's sermon manuscripts and draw their own conclusion base upon his research. The members of the focus group agreed and weekly they read and listened to the information provided to them.

The meetings were recorded as the group deliberated over the data collected from the congregational questionnaires. The examination of the data suggested that most responder's were surprised to learn that there were several passages of scripture that taught that Christians have a responsibility to influence civic affairs. It was interesting to note the reaction of both the congregation and focus group. The comments from the congregation and focus group surprised the researcher because the passages of scripture used in his sermons were very familiar passages for churchgoers.

The researcher communicated this concerned to the focus group; they responded by saying that they were never presented a socio-political perspective of the scriptures before. Perhaps this was why the feedback gathered from the congregation was surprising. The absence of socio-political preaching and teaching had limited the congregation's understanding and knowledge of God's word in contemporary times. Knowing this was invaluable toward the spiritual growth of the congregation and the success of this project. As the focus group debriefed, it was as though a light came on and new revelation was disclosed to them. They were able to assess the raw data collected from the congregation in a whole new context; one of limited understanding rather than resistance. The composite results from the questionnaires suggested that when a sermon is well prepared, those in attendance receive new insights and new perspectives on the God who continues to be the same yesterday, today and forever.

Overall, the questionnaires were a valuable tool in the data collection process. Although a small percentage of members participated in the process, the quality of their findings was most helpful.

Context Associates assisted in developing appropriate questions for each sermon to be included in the questionnaire after reading the sermon manuscript. They raised questions and offered comments that helped the researcher better communicate his objective. The questionnaires became the leading tool for meaningful discussion (Appendix C).

The pre and post-tests were the most revealing revelation in this process. Over the course of the project, the researcher saw transformative learning occurring. The pre-test offered the revelation that most of the focus group members were opposed to the thought of church involvement in politics. The researcher felt that their objections were born out of their misunderstanding of the role that the church plays or should not play in politics. The researcher discovered that they saw the church as a separate institution; it seemed that brick and mortar was the defining reference of the church. The connection of people being the church was an afterthought of the discussion. The researcher was challenged and had to argue that the separation of church and state is not practical because in many instances, people are the driving force that cause both institutions to operate. The researcher discovered that when people formed opinions whether justifiable or not, the process of deprogramming becomes the challenge.

The pre-test indicated that positions were taken and the task was creating a transformative climate for this congregation and focus group. The researcher facilitated this project by leading the discussions.

The pre-test revealed that there was a willingness by the focus group members to explore the researcher's presupposition. The hypothesis that the researcher set forth was based on creating a politically active congregation. The researcher presupposed that the

terms *church/congregation* were the issues of contention. The definition of the term church focus on the institution, the church is noted as the religious building rather than the people who constitute the congregation. The researcher sought to establish that the church institution bears a different set of priorities in servicing its religious community. However, the congregation has a dual responsibility to engage and acknowledge that politics is a way of life that affects our quality of life. The researcher began shaping the discussion by shifting the word church to congregation placing the focus on the congregation rather than the institution in moving towards creating a politically active congregation. The focus group members began to see the correlation of the congregation's responsibility to have some form of engagement in politics.

The researcher found that the best method to create a climate for transformation was to design instructional educational sermons that integrated the biblical text with non-biblical sources. The non-biblical sources established the historical thoughts of progression. The sermons were expository; however, the researcher took a careful walk through the text to show that politics was interwoven in both the Old and New Testaments. The historical data was the expression of thought from the participants as they provided their understanding of their obligation to engage in the public policy conversation. The sermons became the discussions among the worshipper in informal setting after the worship service. The sermons are found in Appendix A.

During this process, the researcher would walk through the church fellowship hall after worship where light refreshments were served to hear the worshippers engaging in discussion regard the sermon subject matter. The conversations would strike a cord and you would hear someone say, "Did you know or what were your thoughts on the

sermon.” The engagement of this kind of conversation among peers provided a thirst for more. The feedback from the members of the focus group indicated that the sermons were insightful. The challenge to the researcher was how to measure the level of transformation? The researcher concluded that the congregation must make the commitment to create a political action group among themselves, and this could be an indication of knowing the measure of this transformative process.

The project was completed and the researcher asked the focus group members once again to prepare a two page essay focusing on the same initial question they were asked to address. Should the church engage in politics? The post-test yielded valuable growth information to the researcher. The results of the essays revealed that the focus group members began to soften their position. The researcher saw this as the strength of the project. However, with this said, the researcher is aware that more teaching is needed to bring about a total transformative experience; but the process was evident that Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Worship Center was undergoing transformative learning.

The researcher contemplated the overall strengths and weaknesses of this project, the growth of the participants and the contribution this project offers in moving a congregation towards becoming politically active. The greatest strength of this project was the learning received by the participants. The researcher sensed excitement from many who possibly for the first time experienced scriptural interpretation from the socio-political context. The questionnaires provided great feedback which allowed the researcher to focus on the areas that needed further explanations. The willingness to hear and learn was obvious. The lack or misunderstanding regarding the collaboration of

church and state became clear. The researcher felt that the materials presented were clear and understandable. The participants voiced an increased insight into the presentations as the researcher sought to define the role and responsibilities of the church and state. The researcher found that the subject matter could have been more defined in moving the congregation towards becoming politically active. An additional strength of the project was the selection of the focus group who knew the pulse of Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church.

Although this project yielded a great amount of information from the participants, the researcher felt that a weakness of the project was its length of time. The project had to be conducted in a reasonable amount of time to maintain the interest of the participants. It also necessitated the leading and guiding the participants into a pre determined end. How it could be questioned if the conclusion is the actual opinions of the participants, or perhaps, a willingness to help the researcher complete the requirement of the doctoral process. With the information collected the researcher felt that pre and post- test could have been expanded to a larger pool of participants.

APPENDIX A
LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION

Friendship Worship Center (UFWB)

Office of the Senior Pastor
Bishop C. Nathan Edwers
261 E. Lincoln Avenue
Mount Vernon, New York 10552
Email: [REDACTED]@aol.com
[REDACTED] cell

Friday, January 21, 2011

Dear My Fellow Partners of FWC,

Grace and Peace be unto you as we are about the business of setting our business in order for this New Year. I am indeed grateful for the outpouring of love shown to me during my 50th birthday celebration. Thanks for your expressions of love, and I am deeply appreciative of all your acts of kindness.

Most of you are aware that in August 2009 I embarked upon an academic journey to acquire my Doctor's of Ministry degree from United Theological Seminary Dayton, Ohio. This is a terminal degree that will complete my studies in the field of Ministry. Nearly thirty years I have been afforded the opportunity to pastor various congregations. It has indeed been a great journey and I will always cherish my experiences. Friendship has been the longest congregation I have served and it is the people of this ministry that allowed me to become the best practitioner I could become.

February is Black History observance. For many years FWC have tried to lift the awareness of the contributions that many African Americans have made in the advancement of our cause. Once again Sister Patricia Holt and her committee have planned a beautiful program for us this year. This year as part of our Black history

observance, I will begin my doctoral studies project. The project title is, "Moving Toward Creating A Politically Active Congregation."

The ultimate objective of this project is to examine how faith and politics can co-exist respectively in Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, NY, by understanding that the wall of separation must be preserved between the State and Church. The wall of separation came as a result of the first amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. The first amendment prohibits Congress from interfering with the exercise of religion and prevents Congress from enacting legislation respecting the establishment of religion. This was known as the Establishment Clause, introduced by Thomas Jefferson, the architect of the Constitution, insisted that the government must not favor one religion over another, or provide aid for any religion. James Madison saw that religion was a private issue that government shouldn't establish, but he did preclude that religion was a part of the American culture. A balance must be the approach of Church involvement in Government. The Constitution never restricted or limited the role of Church in government, but prohibits the role of government in the church. The objective of this project is to show that the African American Church has always participated and challenged the practices of the government when injustice existed.

During this month I will begin a Sermon series entitled, *The Call to Civic Responsibility: Preaching that Affect Change*. I will be preaching Four Sermons titled:

- 1) The Separation of Church and State; The Myth
- 2) From the prison to the palace, God's Strategic positioning

3) The Politics of Jesus as Defined by the Bible

4) Can Christians be Politicians

I have asked eleven members of our congregation to team with me as a Focus Group. I am asking you to help me in this process each Sunday by filling out a prepared questionnaire. This questionnaire will focus on that Sunday sermon. Your honest opinion is helpful and appreciated. The data collected will be analyzed and written into the project document.

Your participation in this project will help sharpen my tools for ministry. You have always been a part of my development and thanks for your patience. If all goes well we can celebrate together the completion of this process in December 2011. Your understanding of not knowing what to expect is a testimony of your faith in my leadership.

Regards,

Bishop C. Nathan Edwers

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION SOLICITATION LETTER

Office of the Senior Pastor

Bishop C. Nathan Edwers
261 E. Lincoln Avenue
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Email: [REDACTED]@aol.com
[REDACTED] cell

Wednesday, November 24, 2010

Dear My Fellow members of FWC,

It is my hope that all is well with you during this season. This past year has been challenging and rewarding to see and experience this work of God in my life. God is a miracle worker and He provides the resources to accomplish His purpose in our lives. In August 2009, I embarked upon an academic journey to acquire my Doctor's of Ministry degree. This is a terminal degree that will complete my studies in the field I have chosen for my life quest. Nearly thirty years I have been afforded the opportunity to Pastor various congregations. It has indeed been a great journey and I will always cherish my experiences. Friendship has been the longest congregation I have served and it is the people of this ministry that allowed me to become the best practitioner I could become.

In this phase I am moving towards the development of this great puzzle, and it is at this time I need your assistance. I have just completed the third phase of this process. The program has been divided into five phases. During the third phase I had to present my project proposal for review and approval from my mentors and faculty advisor. Thank God that my project has been approved and I am moving forward in developing the

various components. The project title is *Moving Toward Creating A Politically Active Congregation*. This project seeks to examine how faith and politics can co-exist in Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church with the proper balance. The ultimate objective this project desires to accomplish is creating a Manual that can be used within Friendship Unified Freewill Baptist Church. This Manual will be written in a form that other churches may find useful.

How can you assist in this effort? I am asking you to be a part of a focus group consisting of 10 members of our church who will help in the development of this project. You will be asked to write a two page essay on your presuppositions of what involvement our church should have in politics. Your honest opinion is appreciated. I will then deliver four sermons during our worship lifting passages of scripture that highlight political or civic involvement, and then you will write another two page essay that once again you will share your understanding of the role of the church in politics. After the end of each sermon preached you will be asked to debrief or fill out a questionnaire. The second essay is to see if your opinion has changed, what issues have surface within the sermon that caused you to become more informed about church involvement, or have the sermons cause you to increase or decrease your political involvement.

I have thought about who could commit themselves to the development of this project. A pre-requisite was developed for the members of this focus group and you fit what is needed. Your input is invaluable and I hope you will consent to help bring this project to fruition. Upon your consent an initial meeting of the focus group will be scheduled. I ask that you send your confirmation as soon as possible. However, because

this project is time sensitive the absolute deadline for your response is Wednesday, December 1, 2010.

It is always a delight to have people who are committed to the development of others. I wish to thank you in advance for your prayers and support. Please feel free to reach out to me. The holidays are upon us and please enjoy this time with your love ones.

Regards,

Bishop C. Nathan Edwers

PS, Included is a copy of the project proposal I submitted for candidate review. Please review to get an understanding of my project.

APPENDIX C
SERMONS AND ACCOMPANYING QUESTIONNAIRES

The project title is "Moving toward Creating a Politically Active Congregation."

Sermon series entitled

"The Call to Civic Responsibility," Preaching that Affects change.

Subject: The Church and State: The Myth of Separation

Romans 13:1 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

I Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

Introduction

We begin this journey with the Call to Civic Responsibility examining the role of the church in shaping and affecting the world. The message Christ gave to his disciples was to be an agents of change in the world. He taught them that they must be in the world but not of the world. Satan acknowledged that there are kingdoms or world systems existing in the world. In Matthews 4: 8 during the Mount of Temptations Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and offered Him the power of the kingdoms. The passage read;

⁸Finally, the devil took Jesus up on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms on earth and their power. ⁹The devil said to him, "I will give all this to you, if you will bow down and worship me." (Contemporary English Version)

Jesus taught his disciples his prayer in Matthews 6: 10 which said, “Your kingdom comes” providing a clue that Gods kingdom was to be established on earth. The word kingdom can be translated to system or government.

Christ declared in Mark 12:17 that all must render under the government what is required.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marveled at him. (NKJ).

Jesus never taught against the governmental authority but Jesus Christ pointed the way for His followers that they have dual citizenship and they must fulfill both requirements of their citizenship.

Apostle Paul informed the early church that they have a civic and religious responsibility to obey the authorities because the powers are ordained by God, and God has made them His ordinances to fulfill His purpose on the earth.

Skip Heitzig wrote in his book “When Kingdom Collide” that he was raised with the idea that it was inappropriate to discuss religion and politics in public. As with him, and many persons like him some have tried to avoid or dismiss the discussion of Church and State. He further states,

“Believers have long wrestled with ways to balance “church” and “state.” Some Christians have turned away from any involvement with the state. For instance, some believe they shouldn’t pay taxes because their money could be used for immoral purposes, such as paying for abortion. Others take the opposite viewpoint, looking to the government to solve all of their problems. They believe that it is possible to legislate morality, hoping the laws of the land will change the hearts of humanity. They want to usher in the kingdom of Jesus Christ through government intervention”¹ (When Kingdoms Collide: Connection Communication, Albuquerque, NM, copyright 2009)

The questions I wish to examine briefly is has the church been misled to believe that there is or must be a Wall of Separation between the Church and State? What does the Bible say about Christian's involvement in government or civic affairs? Should we sit idle as some do and do nothing, or take the position as Jehovah Witnesses' do by refusing to salute the flag and give any kind of allegiance to the Country?

Today is the first sermon of this four part series and has been entitled "The Church and State: The Myth of Separation." Please allow me in the outset to define the usage of the term Myth. In the context of this sermon, myth can be best described as an unproven or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution. A myth is neither a lie nor confession, it is an inflexion. Inflexion means change, changing in the pitch, turning from a course to another.

The Church and State: The Myth of Separation

Our subject matter raises the issue of the Establishment Clause within the First Amendment that guarantee the right of freedom of religion by preserving the separation of church and state. The question that has been asked over time is what was the original intent of this Establishment Clause? The Farmers whom insisted that a line be drawn had no conception that this Clause would raise continuous questions regarding their intention. Can the government really live separately in theory without religion or church? Has America divorced itself from God and not embraced any religion or belief system? These arguments has been debated and redefined with different interpretations from the conception of the United States of America. It is within this context I begin with this presupposition that religion and the church does have its place within the government, and the government must recognize that collaboration is the biblical mandate for all

Christians. Most Americans can refer to separation of church and state but few really know why our forefathers insisted that the newly formed republic must stay clear of declaring or establishing national religion.

When Kingdoms Collide what should Christian do? Should Christians stay within the confines of our churches and allow our voices not to be heard regarding issues that affect our lives on earth. When Kingdoms Collide should we allow politicians to suggest or tell us that preachers should stay in the pulpit and avoid any reference to the plight of social injustice perpetuated by laws that benefits the rich at the expenses of oppressing the poor. The call to civic responsibility is a matter of religion, church and public policy emerging for the common good to maintain a civil society. A civil society is a world with order and controls to preserve human rights and dignity of all.

Please let us examine our text for consideration, the text commands believers to be subject, submit and come under authorities, and those powers (authorities) were established by God. How does the American Christian who wrestles with the idea of Separation of State and Church deal with a biblical perspective of submission to government. If we are separate why should we submit?

Both the Old and New Testaments described how God's people dealt with governments. The Bible teaches us that we must respect the law of the land but confront any issue that doesn't respect the law of God. Daniel and the Hebrew boys respected the law of land under King Nebuchadnezzar until his law violated God's law. In the New Testament Peter and the other Apostles adhered to Sanhedrin until they were told not to obey God's mandate in preaching Christ.

Submission can only happen when God's law is never violated. Submission means to come under; it has the idea of surrendering ones rights.

King Solomon provides a great insight in his understanding of the role and joining together of both religious and government in human lives as recorded in Ecclesiastes 8: 2-9 He said;

1. Obey the authority and commands of the king's or Government for your oath to God v. 2 Solomon acknowledge that one's oath to God must be submission to civic authority. Israel literally took an oath before the Lord swearing allegiance to the kingdom and king of Israel. This vow was a combination of civic and religious commitment. It was understood that the Israelites knew that God established all things.
2. Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Solomon inform the reader where the king word is there is power. The government is empowered to rule for the good.

It almost appears that Apostle Paul took a script out of King Solomon writing. Paul speaks to the universal Christian church in the Roman Empire that Christians must obey the authority (government). Paul declared that Christian must be subject to the authorities because authorities were ordained by God. Please note that Paul writes this section of his Epistle during a time that Caesar Nero was a renowned persecutor of Christians and had many tortured and beheaded. Paul declared that governing authorities were established to execute both good and evil and religion wasn't seen as being separate. Samuel was the religious and civic authority of Israel. The nation of Israel Chronicle of Kings governed both civic and religious affairs at times. Kings would Summon Prophets to the palace to inquire of them if they heard a word from the Lord.

But during the forming of this republic the architect of the Constitution of the United States of America guaranteed the freedom of religion. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had a clear understanding that Congress should never interfere or establish any religion. The Establishment Clause was intended to prohibit the federal government from declaring and financially supporting a national religion, such as existed in many other countries at the time of the nation's founding. It is far less clear whether the Establishment Clause was also intended to prevent the federal government from supporting Christianity in general. The Clause guaranteed and limited the intrusion and involvement of United States Government in any religion. The drafters of the Constitution and Articles of Confederation gave the federal government no power to inject itself into the religious area. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison suggested that there was need to establish "a wall of separation" between church and state.

The original intent of the First Amendment was to keep the government out of people's churches-not to keep church people out of government. The intent was fueled by a secular society often deistic. Many of the contributors wanted to exclude any notion of God refers or intervention in human affairs. However confusion arose over the interpretation of the intent of Establishment Clause because proponents of the clause point out that the same First Congress that proposed the Bill of Rights also opened its legislative day with prayer and voted to allocate federal dollars to establish Christian missions in the Indian lands.

The Constitution was written as a secular document with no direct reference of God. Energetic young leaders emerged to form this new Nation convened in Philadelphia in May 1787 to produce the federal Constitution. Four months of exchange of ideas and thoughts they chose for whatever reasoning to compose a document with no thought of God in all their consultations. When the text of the Constitution was public in mid-September many criticized the Framers of selling out the nation's by showing a cold indifference towards religion. Anger spread and many Critics attacked the Constitution from all angles but especially at the notion that the Constitution never acknowledged God existence nor sought His blessing in forming of this nation.

However, a close examination of the document caused some confusion. Within three places within the Constitution it required an oath to be taken. Many judged the taken of an oath as a religious act summoning a Supreme Being to bear the ultimate witness. If separation of religion was intended why infer "So help me God?" The omissions of God frighten many of the observers, and the observers called the composers reckless and anti- God.

Although the Constitution writers debated about including any reference of God in the document, several of our forefathers acknowledged and addressed the position of this Godless document during the Constitution Convention. James Madison did preclude that religion had its place in the American culture. Madison said that the exclusion of any reference of God didn't infer that the finger of the Almighty didn't guide this newly formed republic. President James Madison once wrote:

"We have at stake the whole future of American civilization not upon the power of government, far from it. We have at stake the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each

and all of us to govern ourselves according to the Ten Commandments.” 2

George Washington also acknowledged that the finger of Providence though dark and mysterious led the formation of the construction and completion of the Constitution of the United States of America. President Abraham Lincoln first acknowledged in his Gettysburg Address that this nation was a nation “under God” This inspired slogan led President Eisenhower in 1954 to add the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance.

Yet hostilities existed among secularist at any notion of the imposing of beliefs or religion as a government mandate. In 1798 John Adams found out that injection of religion practices in government was inflammatory. On March 23rd when American was engaged in war with France, President John Adams decided to proclaim a national day of fasting and humiliation. His action caused him to lose his presidential election of 1800. James Madison saw that religion was a private issue that government shouldn't established, aid nor endorsed. The wall of separation was invisible at best and at times it became difficult to see the demarcation of the line drawn. Often times secularists reminds the church that there is a separation of church and state to devoid any kind of spiritual influence. It's their attempt to hush the mouth of the church when injustice avails in legislative decisions that oppress the least among us.

History has proven that the Wall of Separation has been open for debate and interpretation from the time of its conception. The Supreme Court of United States dealt with an issue in 1947 Everson versus Board of Education a lawsuit brought against New Jersey School District challenging the reimbursement of transportation cost to a Catholic school. The Justices ruled 5-4 that reimbursement to parents' transportation cost was constitutional, however reimbursement to parochial schools was deem as

unconstitutional. Justice Black wrote of the "wall of separation" he viewed the aid in question of serving the state's secular interest in getting kids "safely and expeditiously" to schools. The funding wasn't aiding a religious but providing transportation for students to school. The question we ask is the wall of separation of church and state practical or real? Americans have long realized that our nation was founded under God's authority. Yet the wall of separation was erected. Have this concept of separation caused American society to behavior reckless? I believe government has lifted the wall of separation and have intruded in the church when the church raises questions of morality and decency.

Please let us retrace our biblical teaching of Jesus Christ, and see how we as American Christian can feel comfortable in involving ourselves in civic affairs. Jesus said, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. We must not allow the intimidation of the invisible wall of separation to cause us to look the other way because we are religious. Religion must influence the process of governing. A balance must be found and the government must draw on the wisdom of the church to succeed. The secret of cracking the wall the separate is prayer. Paul encourages the church of Ephesus.

I Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

Paul understood this hostile environment of the State favoring one religion of the over. So he writes to Timothy his son in the Gospel that pray should be made for all those in authority so that Christians can live a peaceful life. Paul knew that opposing the government is only successful when the power of prayer is imposed. Is the wall of

separation real? Some say it is, but as Christians we know how to break through the wall.

Obedience and praying for those in and under authority is our mission as Christians.

What can our contribution be in civic affairs, Pray! Prayer does change things.

PRAY FOR PEOPLE IN AUTHORITY

1. Politicians: the president, cabinet, parliament, diplomats, opposition parties, Ambassadors, etc.
2. The legal profession: judges, advocates, lawyers, legal advisers.
3. Protection services: heads of police, heads of the military.
4. Spiritual leaders: pastors, ministers, priests, rabbis, and also for the spiritual leaders of other false religions.
5. Educational leaders: teachers, inspectors, lecturers, headmasters, rectors.
6. Cultural leaders: prominent persons in the entertainment and sports world, managements of cultural organizations.
7. Commercial leaders: figures of authority in the business world, business leaders, Economists, Bankers.
8. People in authority in the media: editors, executive officials at radio and television stations, editors of magazines.
9. Municipal and government officials: mayors, town clerks, executive officials.
10. Social leaders: chair persons of clubs and societies.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (New International Version, ©2010)

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

This is the word of the Lord for the people of God

Thanks be to God

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your cooperation in participating in our Pastor- Bishop C. Nathan Edwers Doctoral process. This morning Bishop began his Doctoral project as a partial fulfillment of his doctoral work. This sermon is a part of a four part series showing how civic and religion has always intersected. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Your candid opinion of what is said will help him analyze the data and draw conclusions. Please Complete and return this form to the ushers this morning. We need you to fill out this questionnaire in church. Your immediate thoughts are what are needed. Thanks for your input. **Yes or No questions**

1. King Solomon indicates that the power of human systems rest in government authorities, do you believe that God ordain governments? _____
2. Do you believe that the Bible teaches that we must submit to civic government? _____
3. Kingdoms Collide and the Church must take its position; do you believe that the pulpit must divorce itself from speaking out against injustice? _____
4. Did the sermon adequately explain the separation of Church and State and why the Bible teaches and endorses collaboration? _____
5. Do you believe that the Establishment Clause which insists that there must be a separation of State and Church in the US Constitution is necessary? _____
6. The writers of the Constitution left the name of God out of the document could this be readied as Anti- God or religious? _____
7. Should Christians submit to government mandates that are directly against the teaching of Christ? _____
8. Did the farmers who were the majority representatives in the Construction of the Constitution decided to create a New Republic which had any acknowledgement of God? _____
9. Do you think that our civic duty is to pray for our government? _____

Please briefly give Short answers

1. What role does the church have in government?
2. Is Freedom of Religion free within the United States If so, why and if not, why not?
3. Jesus Christ urged his followers to render to Caesar his tribute, why shouldn't USA official recognized the existing of all religions?
4. Is the separation of Church and State real or a false illusion?
5. Some of the writers of the Constitution stood and spoke against this secular document that excluded any reference of God, do you agree that God's name should have been omitted in this document? Why or why not.

The project title is "Moving toward Creating a Politically Active Congregation."

Sermon series entitled

"The Call to Civic Responsibility," Preaching that Affects change.

Subject: From the prison to the palace, God's Strategic positioning

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Introduction

This morning we continue our series on "The Call to Civic Responsibility, Preaching that Affect change". In our quest to lift our awareness of our civic responsibility I wish to expand our focus on the role of the Church in government. God in His providential wisdom has positioned the church and many people of faith strategically within government to impact the direction of government. Throughout America history religious leaders have been summons to the White House, Capitol Hill, State Rotundas, and Municipalities to provide influence and spiritual guidance in times of turmoil, conflict or impasses. Although the Church and State are separated, collaboration is often sought for the betterment of human society. The government exists for the people and by the people, but the Church existence comes from a mandate of Christ Jesus. Christ declared that "upon this rock I will build my Church". The Christian Church is the only institution that is mandated to adhere and teach Christ. Christ taught from a holistically

approach focusing on the total person. The Christian church mission is to save soul through liberation, and offering reconciliation to those who seeks God.

The church goers' bears the burden of living and functioning in both worlds. In both the Old and New Testaments the struggle is evident. We will examine within our text the dual function of a man of faith called Joseph who managed to serve God, and lived at times in a hostile environment that ignored the commandments of God. This being said, Christians must work in both institutions, civic and religious, so that we may live a peaceful and productive life.

In the outset we have acknowledged that the Constitution of United States of America First Amendment created the Establishment Clause that guarantee the separation of Church and State. The separation guaranteed that both institutions would exist independent of each other without any intrusion. The church had the right to govern itself of its religious affairs while United States Government would govern the civic affairs. However, Christians are called to serve a higher power that directs us in assisting human affairs. The question has often been raised in the Bible "who will you serve?" or who will you give your greatest allegiance too, God or Man?

This morning our focus shifts from the separation of the two institutions to the people who bear the responsibility to maintain those institutions. Both church and government are managed by people who govern themselves by a set value system generally influenced by some kind of religious belief. In principle the writers of the Constitution drew a clear wall of separation of both institutions. But time has shown that a clear differentiation have not always been clear. Both institutions have intruded or over step their bound. Last week in our focus group discussion the question was raised, how

could I as an individual divide myself to accommodate both institutions without violating the wall of separation? As a Christian must I divorce myself of my religious beliefs to involvement myself in political activities? I am a citizen of two worlds, God's kingdom and the world kingdom, I must live in both of them, what must I do to fulfill my obligations to both worlds? I aware that some of these thought provoking questions can be interpreted from both extremes. I can do nothing civic but go to church, adhere to the commandments of God and ignore any other things other than religion. Should one disconnect oneself from any religious system and be civic minded uphold the Constitution or the laws of the land regarding any system that suppress, repress or oppress people.

The Bible is the Christian absolute, and we can see a balance demonstrated between religious and civic duties collaborating to maintain order and human decency. There are times that government look to itself and can't find the answers. Pharaoh looked among his governmental advisors wanting an interpreter to reveal and interpret his dream, none was found among them. But God prepared and positioned Joseph through his journey to intersect with Pharaoh. God used Joseph as Israel conduit to give them provision in the season of famine. We will make a more close examination of his life as God raises Joseph in government. Samuel the prophet bears the distinction of functioning in both roles. He was selected by God as Israel religious leader and his role emerged as their civic authority. It was Israel that rejected the dual function, and sought to establish its own separate structure of religion and civic responsibility.

The call to civic responsibility implies that as Christians, we have a duty to engage ourselves in both worlds to lift people, and to ultimately demonstrate the life of

Christ. This happens as Christians model Christ through lifestyles, and not forcing religious beliefs on others.

Genesis 41 records the story of a prisoner named Joseph who was summons to the palace to interpret Pharaoh's Dream. Joseph had successfully interpreted Pharaoh's dream regarding the impending famine, Pharaoh recognized that he was the only man with the ability to make the necessary preparations to save the people: "So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, 'Make way!' Thus, he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt" (Genesis, 41:41-43, NIV).

In commenting upon the significance of the signet ring given Joseph by Pharaoh, John J. Davis characterizes it as "the royal seal..., with which Joseph could transact affairs of state in the name and with the authority of the crown."¹

Pharaoh, in other words, is handing over to Joseph all his day-by-day authority, so that, as he himself says to Joseph, "Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you" (41:40). Joseph's assumption of high office, like his adoption of Egyptian garb is essential for the resolution of the story, in order that his brothers would not recognize him when they come to Egypt to buy grain, and the prophecy contained his early dream of his brothers bowing before him in homage might be fulfilled. Referring to the designation that Bible scholars have given to the author of this part of the Joseph story, Pauline A. Viviano observes: "Joseph is completely drawn into the Egyptian royal court... His new

¹ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 276.

name and the fact he marries the daughter of an Egyptian priest cause no problems for the Yahwist, who simply records it as part of Joseph's new position in Egypt."²

Joseph, of course, comes to assume this position as part of God's plan to ensure the survival of Israel by establishing Egypt as a land where they can come to buy grain. (One might note parenthetically that, while Egyptian famine could readily be explained as a result of one of the periodic failures of the Nile flood, the fact that famine was widespread as far off as Canaan would suggest something more cosmic was at work). Joseph maintains as much after revealing himself to his brothers, when he urges them not to fear punishment for having sold him to Egypt. However, on the second occasion, shortly after Jacob's death, when Joseph repeats this assurance to his brothers, who were in fear and had been kept from killing them only of consideration for their father while he still lived, Joseph says: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis, 50:20). Joseph's phrase "many lives," without his specifying "Israel" this time, would suggest that one purpose of his assuming office in Egypt was to save the lives of Egyptians as well as those of his own people.

Could it be possible that one's involvement in political affairs is a divine setup by God? Can we discuss that God has a strategic plan for the universe, and Him alone places us in strategic position that others may benefit through us. Please allow me to suggest three facts that this scripture seems to convey.

²Pauline A. Viviano, *Genesis, Old Testament, 2, Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1985), 115.

1. First, God does intervene in Human affairs

God can't be taken out of the world system. Always man made amend and delete systems, God is aware. Although each detail of our lives does require God's direct involvement, please note that our God knows. God told Moses that I seen, heard and felt the oppression of my people Israel. God does intervene in human affairs by empowering people to make a difference. The recent development in Egypt of their non- violent protest for change is a demonstration that God allowed people from various religious sects to confront oppression by dismantling a government system that suppress change. God is the God of peace and through peace the nation of Egypt is free of torture and violation of human rights.

Every step of Joseph life God was there

- God was there at Jacob's house with Joseph the dreamer.
- God was there when Joseph was hated by his brothers.
- God was there when his brothers sold him into slavery.
- God was there when Joseph was cast into prison on false accusations.
- God was there when Joseph interpreted dreams in prison and made covenant with the baker.
- God was there when Joseph appeared before Pharaoh and recalled his dream and interpreted the content of the dream.
- God was there when Joseph was appointed second in command in Egypt.
- And yes, God was there when Joseph brothers in search for food show up unknown to them in Joseph court.
- God was there when Joseph and his brothers were eating at his table unknown to them that their brother Joseph whom they thought was dead now served them.

- God guided Joseph steps and position him strategically to save God promise seed. My brothers and sisters God is always involve in human affairs. He show up in your affairs and mines to accomplish his will.

2. Second, God is a master planner who strategically position people to accomplish His plan.

Joseph himself acknowledged to his brothers what they meant for evil God meant for good. Good things do come out of evil. Sometime God uses evilness to demonstrate his strategic plan for us. Many people dismiss any notion of God at work in evil but God is the creator of all things. I believe that United States of America during the forming of this republic had God's divine plan at work. The dissatisfaction of the colonists through over taxation and under representation caused them to craft the declaration of independence forming a new nation. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Constitution without any acknowledgement of God and to some it may seemed as evil, but over our history this nations has stood and fought against the forces of evil. God has blessed America without any reference of Him in the constitution because the people of Faith who make up the nation have trusted in God.

Joseph was locked in prison but Joseph was God's man. Joseph emerged from the prison, because God had placed him in the right place to feed God's people, and preserve God's promise seed. Joseph life was strategically position and the course of events in his had to happen to accomplish God will. Could it be possible that God has position you in the right place to give directions in the time of famine. Could it be possible that you ought to consider being politically involved to bring about change in our communities?

President Obama is a God story, here is a man unknown to the world 3 years ago now governs the free world. He is a black man. President Obama came from humble

beginning, bi-racial parents, raised by a single parent, influenced by his grandmother, a muslim father, Christian mother, the emerging of cultures and classism all at once, touch and taught biblical principles by Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Barak Obama a community organizer in south side of Chicago, an unlikely place and unlikely choice of many, but he became God strategic plan in transforming America with his slogan "Yes we Can". Friendship, activism is a God mission. Think with me if Christians, not just professing Christians but real Christians would run for political office? What kind of legislations would emerge from the halls of power? Perhaps it is you time to rise and make a difference. God is a master planner who strategically position people to accomplish His plan.

2. Finally, Prison does always means terminal

Joseph reminded me of Jesus Christ prison experience. Many of the name Sayers thought once Jesus Christ was crucified and thrown in the grave it was over. The grave was Christ prison but to their surprise it wasn't the end. Jesus rose to the top with all power. Joseph perhaps felt that God had abandoned him. Joseph is lock up with little hope of being free soon. Think how depressing his life story is up to this point. What a turn of events, Joseph dead to his father and brothers. However, God's plans always rise to the top. The dreamer dreams have been fulfilled, and his day of promotion has been set. Prison wasn't terminal at all, God always have a plan that is not terminal but forever abiding.

Some years ago I remember that I was going through a season of great hurt and disappointment. Within my denomination I was being mistreated. See, at times church goers can be mean and unkind. As I was leaving a heated meeting, a long time family

friend, the late Deacon Willie Steele saw my face full of pain and hurt. He said to me that cream always rise to the top. Please notice that before cream could rise it must go through a process of churning. The process is uncomfortable but the cream does rise.

God has a plan for you and He will place you in strategic position to fulfill His plan in your life. Please be sensitive, perhaps God is calling you take an active role in civic affairs to improve the quality of life for all people. Working within Government or around it could be your path to fulfilling yours dreams.

Some years ago I made a decision to stop sitting on the sideline and get involved. As a minister I had many critics who said that my place was the pulpit and not politics. They scorned me, belittled me but I believed the pulpit had the responsibility to intersect with institutions that affect people lives. Joseph and other biblical personalities never lost their connection with God as they were working for Kings. Their convictions were strong and they had an uncompromising faith in God word. They knew that God navigated them although life pathway. They believe that they were in the place of God as Joseph acknowledged to his brothers Genesis 50:18- 19

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said." But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"

Please allow people to discourage you from your involvement in politics, God may be moving you from the prison to the palace. Joseph was in the cabinet of Pharaoh to spare the lives of his people and the Egyptians. Follow the lead of God and maybe you will end up in Pharaoh to save lives.

This is the word of the Lord for the people of God.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your cooperation in participating in our Pastor - Bishop C. Nathan Edwers' Doctoral process. This morning continues the four part series showing how civic and religious collaboration has always intersected. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to the ushers this morning. Thank you for your input.

Please answer Yes or No

1. Do you believe God has a plan for His people and He will place you in a strategic position to fulfill His plan in your life? _____
2. Do you believe that both the church and government are managed by people who govern themselves by a set value system influenced by some kind of religious belief? _____
3. Has both the church and government overstepped their boundaries by co-existing?

4. Does the Bible teach of individuals who demonstrate both religious and civic collaborations? _____

Please provide a short answer.

1. What are the mandates that the Christian church must adhere to?
2. What does the call to civic responsibilities mean to Christians?
3. How do we as Christians have a responsibility to the state?
4. Name a person(s) in the Bible who had a dual role in both church and government?
5. Give an example of how God strategically positioned a person to accomplish His plan?

The project title is “Moving Toward Creating A Politically Active Congregation.”

Sermon series entitled

"The Call to Civic Responsibility," Preaching that Affects change.

Subject: The Politics of Jesus as defined by the Bible

Scripture Text: Luke 4: 16- 20

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Introduction

Often times when the word politics or political is used it has developed a negative connotation. It bears the stigma of distrust and greed. But politics is interwoven in America Society, we all are influence in one way or the other by politics. Both civic and religion has its own set of politics, and often the two collides. This morning the third message of this series begin with the presupposition that Jesus our blessed Lord involved himself in politics. I must give credit to the author of this radical thought; Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. Hendricks published a book entitled “The Politics of Jesus, he said that Jesus was a true revolutionist, and his teaching challenged a political system that oppressed, and exploited the poor. Jesus introduced a new set of politics, Jesus politics

was one of liberation. Jesus mission liberated and uplifted all people with the emphasis of proclaiming “Good News.” We must be clear that Jesus stayed clear away from establishing any political party as we know it today; this would have meant certain death. However, Jesus was a politician, and He knew how to work both the civic and religious systems of his day. Now before you preclude that this message is demeaning Jesus Christ message of salvation, please allow me to set the stage of defining what I mean about Jesus being a politician. Jesus did come to seek and save the lost but His message had overtones of policies that empowered His followers to live in this present world system.

The definition of politics is the process and method of decision-making for groups of human beings. Politics is the forming of policies that directly affects the lives of people. Politics affects every area of our lives, the social order, the economic structures and the educational processes. Jesus saw that the colonization of Israel under the Roman imperial system was an ungodly system at best. The oppression of the poor, the least, the voiceless only lifted the ruling elites both within the Roman Empire, and the Jewish religious establishment. One of the goals of Jesus earthly ministry was to radically change the distribution of authority and power, goods and services, so that all people would experience equality.

Jesus the revolutionist of this non-violent movement preached a message of liberation. Jesus knew that liberation was to set the captive free. Jesus who sought not only to heal people pain but as Hendricks said,” to inspire and empower people to remove the unjust social and political structures that too often were the cause of their pain.” Jesus mandate was a prelude to heaven, the Christian ultimate home. Jesus pushing and establishing kingdom principles were His attempts to recreate an Adamic climate. Jesus

the second Adam offered reconciliation, but this could only be accomplished through the creation of a Godlike environment.

Calling Jesus a revolutionist for most Christian would amount to heresy. But a close examination of Jesus inaugural sermon, after His forty days of fasting and praying on the Mount of Temptations, confirmed that Jesus Christ mission was to introduce radical changes. Jesus affirmed through the reading of the Prophet Isaiah that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed Him to preach, and proclaim change. The radical change was economic, social and political. Jesus didn't just want to address the symptoms but the root cause that polarized the people. Jesus was a Politician and was a master collaborator that work with both the civic and religious government. His method was transformable and the results are still felt today.

Jesus the collaborator knew how to place His hand on the pulse of both systems. When asked the questions about alliance to civic authorities of His day, Jesus commanded His follows to adhere. When Jesus attempted to collaborate with the religious authorities, His first mandate was a call to them that they had to repent. Jesus knew that challenging a political religious system would cause a backlash from those religious leaders but Jesus political platform was about liberation. When the religious leaders learned that Jesus position was firmed they began to conspired, and discredit Him, and eventually have him crucify. Jesus public policy was uncompromising and His approach for change was demonstrated by Him meeting the people needs. Jesus authority came through the Spirit that rested upon His life.

In my research I found a book entitled "Jesus for President", this book title peaked my curiosity, at first I thought that the writer was promoting an idea that Jesus

could be a great contender for the office of President, but to my surprise this book focus on how the church has lost its own identity with what was the intent that Christ had for His church. Jesus intention was to establish a government much different from the one we know today. The angel gives us a clue of Jesus governing strategy in the angelic announcement at His birth, they declared, "Peace on Earth and Good Will towards all Man". Jesus politics was about Peace and Good Will not suppression, oppression or repression, but equality for all regardless of anyone social economic level, Christ Good Will was about the dismantling of levels. President Jesus domestic policy was about social change, and His foreign policy was about preparing Christians to live with our heavenly Father in eternity. But the church had to been intentional to complete and to reach His objectives.

Jesus told His disciples that He had to go away to prepare a place for their coming, this place possessed mansions, streets, center circles that were full with trees and fountains of crystal. This place government presided by President Jesus, will govern all believers, and they will spend eternity there.

Good politics always begins with a platform; our text today is the blue print of Jesus Christ campaign. Jesus is now charged and moving forward with his mission. Jesus visited the synagogues on the day of Sabbath. Jewish religious ritual during those days, as it is still their custom today, extended the courtesy to visitors that they could read the Torah. Jesus opened the scroll and found the place where the Isaiah proclaims messianic prophecy. He read the place that said,

Luke 4: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Please note that Jesus declared the Spirit of The Lord is Upon Me. Jesus acknowledged that His platform was bathed in the Spirit. Jesus had just received affirmation from His Father, He descended from the mountain, and the Holy Spirit had empowered Him with boldness to stand, and proclaim His work to an audience where their hope had faded. This bold approach offering change in public policy was led by the Spirit. Although Jesus never had a political party but His platform was indeed political, and His disciples were commissioned to recruit followers who agreed with His agenda.

Please let me restate how I define politics within this context. Politics is the ability to influence people's lives, and point the direction towards a civic and religious society. This is what Jesus did, and pushed others to do. I am aware that many persons are heavenly minded and at times neglect earthly good, but our blessed Savior knew how to live in the world system, and knew how to employ heavenly principles.

Jesus' main focus of His mission was to preach, heal, liberate and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Now I am aware that many would never call this a platform but I beg to differ, Jesus outlined what He attempted to perform while on earth.

Jesus was establishing a new order, with the approach of lifting, and inspiring people towards change.

The mission of Jesus was evident by the implementation of his policies.

Matthews 25: 41-46 records, how Jesus dismissed those who wanted to be a part of His team on conditions that directly was contrary to His political policies and practice. Please turn your Bible to Matthew 25:42-46

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Please notice that it was assumed that all the followers of Jesus had to be involved in social services. Jesus Christ was a provider of Social Services. Poverty was widespread in those days as it is today. Most of the poor during the time of Jesus was the working class. The gospel narrative records two incidences that caused Jesus to become angry of the exploitation experience by the faithful who visited the Temple to offer sacrifice. Jesus knew the pure heart of the worshippers, and how they did what was necessary to comply with the ritual obligations of their day. Jesus saw and felt that the least among them were denied access because of their state of poverty. Jesus needed the religious authorities to understand that the Temple was the place of prayer and not a den of thieves. The Temple should be the place that meets the needs of the poor. Jesus informed the servants who were expecting rewards from Him that their services were never rendered to the people that needed it the most. He said, I was hungry you feed me not, I was naked you cloth me

not, and in prison no show, then responded to Jesus saying when did this happen, Jesus declared you did it to the least, you have done it unto me. Jesus wanted them to know that He was the embodiment of all the overlooked and those who were cast out, lock out, and would never fit in or benefit from both systems. Jesus declared that “they will go away to eternal punishment.” Jesus was serious about fulfilling His mandate.

I am often surprise to know how many Christian aren't familiar with the social component of Christ Jesus message. Salvation is meant to free us of all the areas of this Christian life. I have read this passage many times but within these verses Jesus outlined a social agenda. The anointing upon Jesus life was about the fulfillment restoring sight, releasing of prisoners and to set the captives free. Civic and religious that seeks to repress will never liberate.

Now let us rehearse the politics of Jesus. As defined by Bible. I hope I have given you a difference angle of Christ Jesus story of liberation. This being said, I wish to conclude with these three points that this text speak to me.

First, it is important to be a true follower of Christ, and not ignore our social responsibility. Some things we must not leave to our government to do. Church is more than just sitting in a pew, anticipating what next; church is involvement in our communities to bring about meaningful change. If you have to run for public do so, but please make a difference. Jesus Christ and His affect His in many ways change the course of human history.

Secondly, rely on the Holy Spirit to anoint you for the task. I must caution you that you know for sure, that God has empowered you through the Spirit to be a champion of change. Proclaim good news, this news will start the process of liberation.

Third and finally, know that Jesus politics should be the politics of all believers who want fulfill his mission on earth.

This is the word of the Lord for the People of God, thanks be to God!

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your cooperation in participating in our Pastor- Bishop C. Nathan Edwers Doctoral process. This morning Bishop began his Doctoral project as a partial fulfillment of his doctoral work. This sermon is a part of a four part series showing how civic and religion has always intersected. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Your candid opinion of what is said will help him analyze the data and draw conclusions. Please Complete and return this form to the ushers this morning. We need you to fill out this questionnaire in church. Your immediate thoughts are what are needed. Thanks for your input.

Yes or No questions

1. The author of this sermon suggested that Jesus was a Politician do you agree? ____
2. Do you agree that the mission of Christ is about liberation? _____
3. Salvation to all is what Jesus offers; do you agree that salvation changes the social perspective of people? _____
4. As a Christian should I embrace the social agenda of Jesus? _____
5. Do you believe that the church is political? _____
6. Do you think that Jesus' platform had a political dimension? _____
7. Do you believe Jesus was political and still won souls for the Kingdom? _____
8. Should FWC develop a social political action group to keep the membership aware of current social issues in our communities? _____

Short answers

1. Please explain your understanding of the involvement of Christians in politics.
2. Should the church develop a social agenda to improve the quality of life for people?
3. What should FWC do in our community to be politically involved?
4. Has this message been informative, and if so, how?

The project title is "Moving toward Creating a Politically Active Congregation."

Sermon series entitled

"The Call to Civic Responsibility," Preaching that Affects change.

Subject: Can Christians be Politicians?

Scripture Text: John 3: 1 -5

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Introduction

The fourth and final sermon of this series asks a thought provoking question, Can Christians be Politicians? I ask that you not be haste in answering this question, because in today climate many Christians wonder whether any Politicians can be a true practicing Christian. This thought bears some consideration because of the tone and the hostile climate often displayed as Politicians debate, and the back deals made to accomplish the goals of a few. However, to suggest that all Politicians are driven by their selfish serving agenda would be unfair. This is why it is critical for people of faith to take an active role in politics in restoring our hope in elected officials who resemble our God consciousness.

Rev. Jerry Falwell the founder of the Moral Majority in the early eighties identified and supported Politicians who were ideologically in line with Christians beliefs. In those days it was presumed that a decent Politician was a Christian. This

assumption caused many Politicians to profess their belief in Christ only to appease to the electorate. However, the curiosity of whether Politicians are Christians is nothing new. Throughout the United States during election time you can hear the issue surface of what faith, if any, does a Politician adhere. Most Politicians declare their faith or announce their faith as a private issue. I have never known any Politician to escape from the question of their faith. Farwell and his huge evangelical base identified issues that were morally appealing to his group, and raised awareness and money to elect suitable candidates who connect and push the Moral Majority platform. This was a great movement that redefined the value of professing Christian as politicians. I am convinced that our moral standards are largely determined by our faith. This is why I am certain that the founders of the United States of America may have excluded the reference of God in the constitution, but the document itself has the undertones of good morality and strong convictions of a belief built on a Godlike faith.

Today I begin this sermon with my own presupposition that the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments shows the engagement of the people of faith in politics. They weren't called Christians in the Old Testament but they were known as God's chosen people. Within the New Testament they were called people of The Way. These were those who followed the teaching of Christ Jesus. Please let me say to you, my brothers and sisters that God always positions, and uses His selected chosen people to assist Him in completing His will. The formulation of public policy is an act of people supervised by the electorate, but with the acknowledgement of a nation under God. We will never assume that all public policy makers are Godly, but Godly people always emerged from the pact to accomplish God's purpose for the universe.

My presupposition also presumed that all Christians understood that they are agents of Change, placed in the world to affect both governmental systems, religious and civic. Whether you are a block association member, social or civil activist, an appointed or elected official, or maybe, involved in some community service organization, we have a moral obligation to get and stay involved. "This is the call to civic responsibility." Things change when people decide to stop sitting on the sideline complaining and get involved. Involvement requires time and commitment. It is sad to say that most of us live in a society that keeps us too busy. We try our best to keep up with our own demands, and many times, we major in the minors. We have allowed others to dictate our lives, and sometimes act irresponsibly, placing their needs priority, and forgetting about the needs of others.

But let me raise the question once again, Can Christians be Politicians?

In a recent article on the internet John Fea raised the following question, was George Washington a Christian. The article said that Washington's faith has heavily politicized in recent years. Some have argued if Washington was a Christian, then America must be too "or" If Washington was not a Christian, then he must have desired that the United States to be a secular nation. Quite frankly little is known about George Washington's faith. Washington was private about his faith. In thinking through I concluded that this was deliberate of him. George Washington didn't leave behind any definitive statement, but Washington gave us a clue of his mindset regarding his faith with the term he often used to describe his life and the course of events, he would use the word "Providence". Washington used this term 270 times in his writing as a word coined by Judeo-Christian referring to God. The acknowledgement of God's Providence

suggested that Washington knew that God was at work in people lives and navigated human affairs. We can presume that George Washington knew God through the person of Jesus Christ. This assumption has some merit because his counterparts, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin at times in their lives acknowledge the significant role of God in their lives. Although these men lived in a deistic culture particularly among the elites, Christianity was strong throughout the American society.

History bears record that the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great converted to Christianity and made Christianity the official recognized religion in 312 AD. Emperor Constantine legalized Christian Worship, provided equal protection, returned confiscated churches and properties to Christians, became a great patron of the Christian Church and set a precedent for the position of Christian Emperor within the Church. State and Church began to co- exist under Constantine reign. These years would be seen as the earliest glory years of Christianity. Prior to those years Christians suffered from sporadic and localized persecutions and many were executed because of their refusal to worship the Roman emperor. But Constantine conviction and conversion bought an end to the unjust actions of his predecessors.

I am aware that once a person announced that he or she are a Politicians a level of suspicion rises, and once they choose to acknowledge their faith in God as a Christian many people doubt their seriousness. But the Bible makes clear all people must Be Born Again. Please draw you attention to this conversation that Jesus has with Nicodemus. The back drop of this text deserve note. The text provides the readers with a brief biographical overview of Nicodemus. Please let's look at the text John 3;

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Nicodemus was a Politician who comes to Jesus at night. Nicodemus was a part of a Jewish ruling council who refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of Jesus ministry. He called Him teacher and declared you are a miracle worker come from God. In reading through this text I saw a man of influence fall to his knees before Jesus. Nicodemus acknowledged through his actions, coming to meet Jesus at night, unnoticed by his colleagues, that the things being said of Jesus in the council doesn't represent what is really happening through Jesus. Nicodemus said I am convinced that you are sent from God. I am aware that any good Politicians knows what to say, and how to say it, but Jesus wasn't in impress by His statement. Jesus said to him "you must be born again."

Please notice within the text that Jesus said, no one can see or enter the kingdom until they are born again. Two words that we will expand upon within this text, "See" and "Enter". Could you just imagine how confused Nicodemus was in understanding what Jesus said? Jesus said to Nicodemus your sight will always remain impaired until you are born again. Wow, what a revelation! Please think of how many people, including Politicians whose sight is impaired because they never accepted Jesus as the sight giver. Jesus said; you don't have the ability to see kingdom principles with distorted optical vision. People who are Born Again can see! Any person who manages a system without sight will always have trouble finding their way. Jesus said, you can't see the kingdom

without sight. I believe all people including Politicians need sight. They need Sight to see, sight to perceive and sight to comprehend.

Often times we miss the benefit of this text by fighting with ourselves about the requirement to receive the benefits. Jesus said; Born Again people will always have sight to see the kingdom. Now early in this series I suggested that kingdom also means system. Please allow me to paraphrase; being born again unlocks your sight that provides you the ability to see the system of God. Seeing the kingdom of God requires each of us to be born again, having our own encounter with Jesus. I must admit I have approached this text with my own biases, I believe that a born again Politicians is a Christian that has good optical vision.

Jesus said, Nicodemus to have access to the kingdom or this system, you must be born again. The word “Enter” means the ability to access the kingdom of God. Most people reading the text would preclude that Jesus meant access to a kingdom not to the world, I beg to differ. Entered into the kingdom of God could infer the ability to collaborate in both worlds. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that although you are positioned correctly in your religious governmental kingdom, the access of my kingdom requires a rebirth, a cleansing and shedding of the old you.

Born Again required cleaning and shedding and this is what I believe politicians who represent the Christian community must have to succeed. In this modern era President Jimmy Carter had no problem in announcing he was a born again Christian. He would often during his Presidency quote scripture in testimony to his faith. He perhaps read this scripture John chapter 3 and discovered that in order to have sight, and have access into a God’s kingdom one must be born again. Now this sermon is not about the

process of this conversion experience but the first acknowledgement of any true public servant is their ability to reborn. The new language today is makeover, Jesus said to Nicodemus and us; are we willing to have a complete makeover in order to see and enter into the kingdom of God.

Now to answer this fundamental question, Can Christians be Politician? I believe this story of Nicodemus can answer this question. This text that is called into our discussion is silent over the outcome of Jesus discourse with Nicodemus.

However, the next time we hear of Nicodemus was in John 19: 39 listen to what it said,

Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away. With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes.

The politician Nicodemus participated in the burial process of Jesus. We can conclude through his actions that Nicodemus was born again, and continue his life of politics on the Jewish Council. See, what each of you need to know is that the Jewish Council was a religious government that governed every aspect of the Jewish community. They collaborated with Roman government to keep civil order among the various classes of people. Nicodemus a born again politician assisted in the burial preparation of the body of Jesus. Nicodemus was there at grave site of our Savior body because Jesus had impacted His life, and Nicodemus was born again. Now I believe that the life story of Nicodemus teaches three important facts.

First, all who comes to Jesus receive the same directive.

It doesn't matter, what social economic level you are on, what political party you belong too, or the power and influence you posse, Christ directive is that you must be born again. Nicodemus, perhaps, a great community leader but he had one missing link, and Jesus urge him to get it straight. Everybody receive the same directive, black, white, rich, poor, large, small, happy, sad, mad, peaceful, religious or non-religious we all receive the same directive.

Second, the benefit of being born again is sight and access.

It's always refreshing to know that being connected to God you will always benefit. You will receive sight to see, and access for your empowerment. Every Politician who is born again receives Godly sight and access. At times it may not be evident, but they do have the benefit of usage.

Third and Finally, being a Christian can own complement a Politician.

I am always impressed by Politicians who understand the importance of a God consciousness as they deliberate over issues that affect people lives. Politicians who pray and study God's word will always be able to discern what time it is, and will be grounded, not letting pride lift them but never forgetting that providence has landed them where they are. Yes when you are Born Again you can be the best you can be. This is our call to civic responsibility

This is the word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God!

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your cooperation in participating in our Pastor- Bishop C. Nathan Edwers Doctoral process. This morning Bishop is preaching his last sermon towards his Doctoral project as a partial fulfillment of his doctoral work. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Your candid opinion of what is said will help him analyze the data and draw conclusions. Please Complete and return this form to the ushers this morning. We need you to fill out this questionnaire in church. Your immediate thoughts are what are needed. Thanks for your input.

Yes or No questions

1. _____
2. Do you think that George Washington was deliberate in not professing his faith?

3. Jerry Falwell started the Moral Majority to promote Christian ideology regarding social issues. Would you like to see something of this kind reinvented?

4. Was Nicodemus a politician that was Born Again? _____
5. Do you believe that the benefits of being born again are sight and access? _____
6. Should Politicians declared their profession of faith? _____
7. Do you think your involvement in civic affairs hinder your faith in Christ? _____
8. Can Christians be Christian and Politicians? _____
9. Do you feel you have a better understanding of the separation of Church and State? _____
10. Should FWC members become more political active? _____

Short Answers

1. Does the separation of the Church and State truly exist or is it an illusion?

2. Is it important for politicians to be Christians?

3. Please describe briefly what you have learned during this series.

APPENDIX D
SAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP ESSAYS

Church and Politics

Participant One

All through the elementary and high school years, and even our adult years we were taught separation between church and state. Thus ingraining in us that religion has no place in the political arena and politics no place in the church. While I still believe this still holds true somewhat, it is not total reality. Although I believe that religion and politics are independent of each other, at times the two will coincide.

I believe the church is the one sacred place for God's people. It is a gathering place where people come together usually to hear what thus saith the Lord through the voice of the pastor or other religious leader, a place to meditate, find solace and peace in the God's Word. But, through history, preachers have used the pulpit as a means of providing knowledge to its congregation. So, one must ask the question, is this politics?

I find it inexcusable that politicians choose Sunday morning worship service to use the pulpit as a platform to "peddle their wares," making all kinds of promises that they either cannot keep or never intend to keep. In many cases it is my belief that they just want to gain or maintain their political seat. Sometimes their rhetoric and what might be misread as double-talk, can cause a tense atmosphere and confusion to some, especially during election time. In fairness I do believe that there are some politicians who are sincere in their efforts and are truly using the religious arenas to inform the people, and what better forum to find a large number of people.

Unfortunately, this is the only way some people really find out what's happening in the world or even in their own back yard communities. Information is written in the

neighborhood newspaper, or internet, but many of us are too busy to take the time and read.

Although some politicians do have a sincere agenda planned and fully intend to make good on their campaign promises, it is all too often there are those that only show up at election time and usually don't find it necessary to even spend one full hour at church to hear the message, and fellowship with the members. It's on to the next church, and time is of the essence.

Historically the church has provided not just a place for worship, but a place to inform the people of the community of changes in laws and other non religious or social events. It is often used neighborhood meetings. Given people assurance that they can voice their opinions and needs and not be intimidated to so.

Today, the church has become corporations to attract people of influence, often politicians. No longer is the building set aside just Sunday morning worship or Wednesday night prayer. Being community active puts it in a position to gain the resources to provide services that can assist the membership at large with day to day living, providing such services as day care affordable housing, job training, educational opportunities, health services, food banks shelters, etc.

In conclusion it is my opinion that church and politics must some time work hand and hand to reach the best solutions for the greater number of people.

Church & Politics
Participant Two

There's a fine line to draw when it comes to Church and Politics. However, I believe the two must be kept separate and not incorporated in Sunday morning services.

If it's Social Politics concerning the community, then I'm all for it because it is our community and people needs to be aware of their surroundings and what we as people can do to make it better.

Congregations are made aware of what's going on in the world and their community, through the news, papers and governmental hearings that's open to the public with a more in depth understanding of the issue at hand.

Yes, the church should be involved in some matters/issues that will affect the church as a whole such as zoning, outreach and should be communicated through an appointed group of members from the congregation.

However, if the politics has absolutely nothing to do with the community, then it needs to stay out of the Church, especially on the day that we are suppose to Praise and Worship.

If a Church wants to speak Politics, then there should be a separate night advising its members of the agenda and leave it up to them to attend. An anonymous survey should be done to see how the members of this Church feel. I personally, would think that most of them wouldn't want to hear about any Politics during their time of Praise and Worship.

Leaders in the congregation must set boundaries and balance especially during election time when politics are brought to the house of Worship.

One does not have the right to impose their views upon people in a setting that a debate would be shunned upon. Freewill, Freedom of speech.

It takes faith that God will guide your thoughts to the person that is most suitable to lead in the political arena. I've read were" most Christians agreeing that their faith affects how they approach politics, but disagreements arise over the political role of the church."

This true because the majority of politicians make empty promises only to receive your vote. In reality they are asking you to put your trust in them and not in God. Particularly at election time, they will grace you with their presence for a few moments to disrupt your worship to God, stand in the Holy Place, the pulpit and proceed with their agenda.

I asked a colleague a question this week, as we have discussed church many times before. I asked the question. *If you were a first time visitor at a church one Sunday morning. Service was going quiet well, people were friendly, welcomed you with smiles and open arms. Singers and choirs were great. Then preacher got up to speak, announcements or whatever and it was all about politics. Or if politicians address the congregation, what would your reactions or thoughts be?*

Her response was a page long, however on the question asked. Me personally, I cannot get into Church the way I used to because I feel like it's all about politics. No one is there for God anymore. Oh and I was that person that was a guest on quite a few Sunday mornings and all I heard was politics...guess what, I never went back. When it becomes about things other than God, the reason we're there, then I cannot subject myself to it.

We are in a time where politicians have failed the people and to assemble in God's house for strength, renewal this is a turn off to the growth of the local assembly. The only manual I need or that is needed for church is the Holy Bible.

Church and Politics

Participant Three

People have many different feelings about religion and politics. Throughout history these feelings have been expressed extensively in the media. Some don't believe that politics should ever be discussed within the church. Others don't mind the mixtures of the two. It may be safe to say that politics are sometimes misunderstood. I believe that the influence of the church on politics is for the better good of the people.

Throughout history the church's involvement with in politics has been slim to none. In fact it was believed that the only laws needed in the world were the laws that were written in the bible. "The traditional Evangelical churches... citing that Christ is our hope, not politicians..... those same folks inexplicably and hypocritically support government solutions to problems that aren't governmental."("Christian Political Involvement and the Hypocrisy of the Religious Left" by WarAxe at <http://negative99.com/faith/christian-political-involvement-and-the-hypocrisy-of-the-religious-left/>).

This is perfect example of some people feelings towards such politics. Another example is "Christians find their fundamental citizenship in heaven (Philippians 1:27; 3:20), and this citizenship should shape or thinking and behavior more than any other allegiance. So even though we are citizens of a nation..... our heavenly citizenship encourages and enables us to step back from these secondary allegiances as we seek to view life from God's perspective."(The Church and Politics in America by Rev. Dr. Mark D. Roberts at <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmfiles/resources/churchandpolitics.htm>)

Today churches are involving politics into its services more often. On any given day during elections you can find all types of political posters inside churches. There is

even a frequent amount of politicians visiting churches to speak directly to the people. Today "the church's role in politics is to be there visibly in the context of political policy formulation. The church has to be prophetic, speaking for God. The church has to herald the ethical values that enrich a nation. The church has to be bold and forthright, constructive and innovative. The church has to be "salt and light" in what is so often a corrupt environment, to bring light and health." ("The Church's Role in Politics" Dr Jim Harris Associate Rector at Emmanuel Church, Wynberg, Cape Town).

My opinion in the matter is that it is very important to keep an open mind and heart on the matter. Politics isn't something that can be ignored or avoided. It is and will always play a huge role in the way that the world around us is ran. People should "be engaged... and participate in the political process because that it obedient and ultimately effects us, our children, our culture and our ministries we support."("Christian Political Involvement and the Hypocrisy of the Religious Left" by WarAxe at <http://negative99.com/faith/christian-political-involvement-and-the-hypocrisy-of-the-religious-left/>). "The church needs to continue engaging with government on justice, corruption, leadership, economic debt, housing, education, health care, safety and security, policy, and whatever else is morally important. Further, the church needs to be saying "yes" as well as "no" to governmental promises and policies. By "no" I mean to clearly oppose wrongdoing, corruption, or anything else deemed unedifying and not benefiting society. "Yes" supports commitments to fulfilling promises made to making real efforts to curb crime, to making education truly a prime target for development, to making health care accessible and significant - not second-rate."("The Church's Role in Politics" Dr Jim Harris Associate Rector at Emmanuel Church, Wynberg, Cape Town)

The church hasn't always involved its self in politics. Over time the outlook on church and politics has changed for the better. Politics is needed in the church for the better of the people within it. I believe that the influence of the church on politics is for the better good of the people. The church hold the key to saving a soul and politics has the key to a better nation together people can be changed for the all around better.

Church and Politics

Participant Four

A Church is defines as a body or organization of religious/baptized believers. Even though we are a spiritual body of believers, and a family, like all families, we are individuals who have our ideas and thoughts about most things. We are not puppets on a string that can be manipulated by a master puppeteer.

To that end, we may act and think differently regarding our spiritual, personal, and political views. How can the Church not be involved in politics, when we are the same people? How can we separate ourselves when we reside, work, and vote in our neighborhoods? I am a long time member of Friendship Unified Free Will Baptist Church, but I am also involved in civic, political, and community affairs. When I attend my church I can separate myself from the things in my community, and the affairs of this world and focus only on the hereafter?

As Christians and church-goers, there is no way we can escape politics. Even Christ became a pawn in the political powers struggle in His day between the religious leaders and Pilate. The religious leaders could not sentence Jesus Christ to death themselves, the Roman leader Pilate had to give permission. Even in paying taxes, Jesus stated "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God, what is God's" As Christians, we have dual citizenship. We commanded to obey the laws of the land and to pay taxes for the services we receive. We are required to go to the polls and vote for the people who will make laws that will govern our lives for the good or the bad. That is politics.

As a citizen In the Kingdom of God, we are to be obedient and under total submission to God. The church is a place where all people, no matter what their political party is, or what their political views are, can come together and find a common ground. A place where we can discuss our views and pray that God will lead, guide and direct us in the right path. If the church would do this without personal gain or self-gratification, we could change the order of things. Godly men and women in office, serving as servants of the people for the people. It is revealed in the scriptures how we should live not only in the world to come but also how we are to live in this world. The church is commanded to herald the word. We must be holistic. We are people of faith. Therefore, as people of faith we must do our part to be good citizen in this world and the world to come. We must let the world know that we can do all things through Christ who gives us the strength. Isaiah 9:6-7 states, " For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on His shoulders, and He will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty

God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end". There were times, many years ago at Friendship U.F.W. Baptist Church when it seems as if the only subject of interest coming from the pulpit was political. Even prayers were political in nature by certain deacons. Even though the sermon may have been informative, at times, personally I wanted to hear something more spiritually up-lifting. Sometimes there was no balance. Over time this changed, and a balance occurred. I cannot say whether I changed as I became more actively involved in community and civic affairs, employment and other organizations, or whether it was the times we were living in. But there was more of a balance. Politics plays an important part

in our lives. Church is the place where we can find the strength to sustain us and the faith to keep believing. Thanks God for the man or woman of God who can inform, inspire, and maintain a proper balance.

Church and Politics

Participants Five

The following essay is an overview of my Presupposition of what involvement our church should have in politics. I think that the church needs to recognize that it's imperative to have a role in politics. In today's society we are faced with various socio-political-economic issues. We are also faced with a variety of different cultures, opinions and political views amongst older and younger generations. When dealing with such a diverse congregation Pastors take on an additional leadership role of being the voice of the church and the community. I look forward to knowing I have a leader in the house of worship that is knowledgeable of all subject matters that may affect my life. Topics relating to economics, civil rights and government are a reality and should be discussed with our church leaders and peers.

My memories of Church activists begin with the late Martin Luther King and Malcolm X who fought for African American Civil Rights to the present date of Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson and other civil rights leaders. Visits to large, influential black churches have been a standard strategy of Democratic office-seekers for more than fifty years. Black churches are a site of organized, committed, well-networked, partisan faithful who can be influenced and mobilized by adept candidates. No local, state or national official can claim to have actively courted the African American vote without regular and visible attendance at black worship services. For example, in both 1984 and 1988 Reverend Jesse Jackson's primary presidential campaigns were built on the structure of black Southern and urban congregations. Not only did Jackson employ a rhetorical style reflecting his training as a black preacher, but he built a campaign organization

centered on black Christian volunteers, black church contact lists, donations from black religious services and an ideology that relied heavily on black Christian understandings of the connection between the sacred and the political. President Bill Clinton was adept at using black rhetorical styles borrowed from the church as well as the organizational resources and networks of black churches to motivate black electoral support. I was influenced to vote for President Bill Clinton and other political leaders based on their connection with African Americans and the Church.

It is possible that future Democratic presidential primaries will not produce a single candidate with a majority of the black vote; however, the frontrunners may split the vote based, in part, of their command of different elements of black religious life at the intersection of black politics. The black church is likely to remain the single most imperative political organization among African Americans. It is the oldest indigenous black institution and it is historically and presently significant in developing African American political culture and encouraging African American political participation. I firmly believe that the church is not a political organization. However, worshipping in black congregations, believing radicalized religious ideas and imbuing black religious culture continues to have relevance in the political world as well as the sacred.

In conclusion, I appreciate the fact that the Pastor of Friendship Worship Center is so politically inclined that he can inform me of political issues that I am uninformed of. Unfortunately, many African Americans are not aware of their rights and the impact the government has on their rights. I refuse to be ignorant to the political world because I want my voice to be heard throughout my community. I feel as though the Bishop C. N.

Edwers is my voice in the political arena, he relates the message of the people to political figures that are not accessible to the normal working class citizen.

Church and Politics

Participant Six

The following essay is an overview of my Presupposition of what involvement our church should have in politics. I think that the church needs to recognize that it's imperative to have a role in politics. In today's society we are faced with various socio-political-economic issues. We are also faced with a variety of different cultures, opinions and political views amongst older and younger generations. When dealing with such a diverse congregation Pastors take on an additional leadership role of being the voice of the church and the community. I look forward to knowing I have a leader in the house of worship that is knowledgeable of all subject matters that may affect my life. Topics relating to economics, civil rights and government are a reality and should be discussed with our church leaders and peers.

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